

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of PropertyHistoric name: Sage Creek Ranger StationOther names/site number: Sage Creek Work Station, Sage Creek Guard Station, Sage Creek Fire Station, Sage Creek Guard House

Name of related multiple property listing: _____

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A**2. Location**Street & number: Custer Gallatin National Forest, Sage Creek Guard Station Road 2223, Pryor Mountains,City or town: Bridger State: MT County: CarbonNot For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☒**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this x nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property x meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide x local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

x A ___ B x C ___ D_____
Signature of certifying official/Title:_____
Date_____
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:_____
Date_____
Title :_____
State or Federal agency/bureau
or Tribal Government

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☐
Public – Local ☐
Public – State ☐
Public – Federal ☒

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s) ☒
District ☐
Site ☐
Structure ☐
Object ☐

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u>3</u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register None

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling
GOVERNMENT

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

GOVERNMENT

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER: rustic log

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

FOUNDATION: CONCRETE

EXTERIOR WALLS: WOOD, log

INTERIOR WALLS: WOOD, dimensional lumber

FLOOR: WOOD, TILE

ROOF: WOOD, shingle

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The historic Sage Creek Ranger Station, now referred to as the Sage Creek Work Station, is located in the Ranger Canyon drainage, south of where the drainage enters Sage Creek in the Pryor Mountains of south-central Montana at an approximate elevation of 6000 feet. The Crow Indian Reservation lies less than one mile to the north. The ~4.63-acre, now work center, consists primarily of a vernacular log building, originally built as a cattle ranch line cabin, and accompanying site improvements. The Main Cabin of the Sage Creek Ranger Station remains the only Forest Service administrative cabin building of four that once existed within riding distance of each other in the Pryor Mountains.¹ The building was constructed in three phases, beginning in 1892, and completed in the 1920s. The L-shaped structure measures 41' 8" north-south by 16' 8" wide and 50' 8" east-west by 16' 9" wide, exclusive of the covered porch. In addition to the Main Cabin, the National Register boundary encompasses a modern outhouse, a flagpole, remnants of a post and pole corral, and a small irrigation ditch.

¹ *Forest Service is restoring old ranger station in Pryor Mountains.* Brett French, Billings Gazette, December 8, 2011.

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Narrative Description

The nominated area lies on the valley floor, and includes the historic Sage Creek Ranger Station Main Cabin and a recently added vault toilet (outhouse).² In addition, the site encompasses three contributing structures in the form of a post-and-pole corral, a small irrigation ditch, and the original flagpole assembly.³ Over the years, the site has been referred to as the Sage Creek Ranger Station, Sage Creek Guard Station, Sage Creek Guard House, Sage Creek Fire Station and its current moniker, the Sage Creek Work Station.⁴ Although currently referred to as the Sage Creek Work Station, the historic name of the property, the Sage Creek Ranger Station, will be used throughout this nomination. In 1978, Larry G. Robson filed for the site to receive the Smithsonian Trinomial 24CB0086.

Main Cabin (one contributing building)

The over 100-year-old vernacular building is a one story, log bearing building with an L-shaped floor plan. A covered porch runs along the inside of the “L”. The building currently sits on a concrete foundation with crawl space, but originally rested on wood-on-stone. The west leg of the “L,” built in 1892, displays sawn exterior log walls. Following the construction of the cabin, other ancillary buildings, including a barn and sheds, were constructed on the site, but in 1918 “most of the buildings were razed by a hurricane event.”⁵ The north leg of the Main Cabin’s “L,” and the kitchen infill were added in the mid-to-late 1920s, both sections feature exterior hewn log walls.⁶ Evidence suggests both the north section and kitchen section may have been brought in from elsewhere.⁷ Local resident Bert Schwend explained that the fire scars on the northern section are because the logs were harvested from an old wildfire burn area near Tie Flat.⁸ The logs are joined with square notches and daubed with masonry and tar. The hewn logs and saw cut logs each represent construction with materials typical to their historic periods and geographic trends. The use of sawn logs prior to hand-hewn logs was verified during the “building lift” in 2006, where a close inspection of the building underside by the Forest Service Region 1 Historic Preservation Team revealed the sequence of construction through the placement of floor joists.⁹

² Forest Service file *2007&2008-SageCreekCabin-toilet.pdf*.

³ The property historically held several other buildings and structures since removed.

⁴ File IMG_6787.jpg, *Archeological Recommendations on the Sage Creek Guard House*, Larry G. Robson, August 25, 1978.

⁵ Forest Service file *SageCreekCabin-history.pdf*. Other buildings soon replaced many of those buildings previously lost; however, many of those subsequent buildings no longer remain either.

⁶ This sequence of construction was verified by the Forest Service Region 1 Historic Preservation Team through an inspection of the underlying floor and connection system.

⁷ The exact date of when the north leg and kitchen sections were brought to the property and attached to the existing 1892 building is uncertain; however, their presence is known by their appearance in photographs taken in the late-1920s, and 1929 specifically for one photo. In addition, it is also possible that both sections added to the existing building could potentially pre-date the 1892 section. While unknown, it is possible that Ranger Raymond Coster was responsible for the expansion of the Main Cabin, in anticipation of his and his family’s move there; Forest Service file *SageCreekCabin-history.pdf*.

⁸ Forest Service Email Halcyon LaPoint to Tim Urbaniak November 6, 2019.

⁹ Forest Service file *2006-FieldNotesOnSageCreekCabinConstructionSequence.pdf*.

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An open porch is inset into the “L” and extends across the full width of the west elevation of the north wing and the north elevation of the south wing. The porch has a shed roof, supported by a header and columns of square wood 4 x 4s, and a concrete floor. The concrete floor was replaced in 2009. It is partially enclosed with a low concrete wall that has walk-through openings corresponding to the north and west doors. In 2014, the Forest Service constructed a new wood back porch and stairs on the east elevation, replacing an earlier shed-style back porch.¹⁰ An ADA access ramp was added to the west side of the cabin in 2014 and rebuilt in 2019. The porch columns and headers are painted white to match the log daubing, doors, windows, and door and window trim. The cabin has three paneled wood exterior doors in the north, west, and east elevations, and two paneled interior doors. The north elevation exterior door has been upgraded to be ADA compliant. The Main Cabin has a variety of window types including six-by-six-lite sliding units, two-over-two-lite double-hungs, and two-lite and four-lite fixed.

Interior

The interior retains the original wood floors, refinished throughout the building. The floor of the northern leg lies a step lower than the kitchen and west leg. In the kitchen area, at the intersection of the two legs of the “L,” a grey floating linoleum (Marmoleum) floor covering has been added. The plaster and sheetrock of the interior walls are painted white, with the interior baseboard and trim painted a buttermilk color. The open ceiling reveals three parallel purlins in both legs of the “L.” The purlins in the northern leg of the building end at the extent of the original hewn structure, and the purlins in the western leg extend through the kitchen area to the east wall. Some of the interior door hardware is original to the building while those that have been replaced retain the style of the historic period.

The interior floor plan includes two bedrooms, one at each end of the building “L.” The bedroom in the northern leg, which served as the office, is separated from a larger dining room by a wide wall that features built-in shelves, drawers, and an arched pass way. Within the archway are the remnants of an earlier chimney. The western bedroom is separated from a living room/office by a wall constructed of dimensional lumber and includes a door. The living room/office is the location of the building heat source, a (now contemporary) wood stove. The kitchen contains some lower and upper cabinetry, recently installed based on the tracks on the walls and the floor. Between the kitchen and the living room are three small rooms; the room on the south once served as a bathroom, and the two on the north presently serve as a storage closet and pantry.

Post-and-Pole corral (one contributing structure)

Lying north of the Main Cabin is a post-and-pole octagonal corral. The corral measures about 20’ in width and features 10 poles placed horizontally to a height of about 5 feet. The corral gate is located in the west-facing polygonal segment of the structure. Similar to the horizontal poles that extend between the 4”-6” vertical posts located at the geometric vertices, the gate also

¹⁰ A shed style back porch on the east side of the house at the door leading to/from the kitchen was removed in 2006.

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exhibits 10 horizontal poles approximately 3" horizontal members. There is also a connecting gate that runs east-west off the west side of the corral. Nearby are limited remains of associated fencing. Early photos of the property show the corral in place.

Flagpole Station (one contributing structure)

An approximately 30' tall flagpole station stands immediately northwest of the Main Cabin. The flagpole station is comprised of approximately 8" diameter pine poles; two buried in the ground that display 4' protruding sections, project up on opposite sides of the flagpole to support the flagpole itself, which is centered between the two 4' poles. Early photos of the property dating to the 1920s show the flagpole in place.

Irrigation Ditch (one contributing structure)

A small dirt-lined irrigation ditch is located at the base of the hillside on the west side of the valley. During earlier years, the ditch was used to irrigate a sizeable garden plot, located northwest of the house. The ditch measures approximately 2' wide by 2' deep and terminated at the garden plot. Water was diverted from nearby Sage Creek. Whereas no evidence of the garden plot remains, the ditch is still visible. The location of the ditch is seen on the aerial map and the "Improvement Plans, Sage Creek Ranger Station, Beartooth National Forest" map near the end of the nomination on pages 61 and 63.

Outhouse (one noncontributing building)

West of the house stands a recently-constructed outhouse. The single room vault toilet has a wind screen vestibule on the north side that shrouds the extended concrete floor. The structure has cedar shingle covered roof and walls.

Integrity

Several buildings and structures historically associated with the Sage Creek Work Station have come and gone as its use evolved over time. These include a perimeter post-and-pole fence around the Main Cabin. Features noted at the property in a 1931 Forest Service document included a lavatory/bath building and its associated plumbing, a barn, a lean-to garage, a lean-to wagon shed, poultry house, and 16'x20' frame warehouse.¹¹ A 1990 inventory of the property reported features still standing at that time included the log house, a rectangular wood frame storage shed northwest of the house, a fire cache, engineer's shack, three outhouses, the post and pole fence that surrounded the Main Cabin, a well/cistern consisting of a steel metal culvert, an aluminum culvert pipe that was part of the early sanitary system, and the post and pole corral located to the north.¹²

¹¹ Forest Service file *SageCreekRS-1931-Narrative-Cropped.tif*, *Memorandum to Accompany Administrative Building Plan Map (Revised March 1931)*, provided by the Forest Service. This document also proposed future construction on the property to include a 14' x 16' warehouse to replace the frame warehouse, a coal and wood shed, and bunkhouse.

¹² J. Bolton and A. Hubber, *Draft National Register of Historic Places Registration form, Sage Creek Work Center*, Historical Research Associates, Inc, June 1990.

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Despite the loss of a number of features, the Sage Creek Ranger Station retains sufficient integrity for listing in the National Register. While many of buildings and structures historically associated with the property no longer remain, the primary building, the Main Cabin, does, as do three smaller associated features, the flagpole, the post-and-pole corral, and a small irrigation ditch. Integrity of design, materials, and workmanship remain fair to good with the existing resources. The Main Cabin embodies the Forest Service's desire to blend the infrastructure with the natural environment per their plans of the 1920s and 1930s. Some rehabilitation to the cabin occurred in the mid-to-late 2000s to preserve the building. These preservation measures included replacement of a concrete porch floor in 2009, the removal of a shed style back porch on the east side of the house in 2006, the construction of a new wood back porch and stairs in 2014, addition of an ADA-compliant access ramp to the west elevation in 2014 (and rebuilt in 2019), and the installation of an ADA compliant north facing exterior door. The Main Cabin continues to display the early rustic log cabin architecture common during the late 1800s and early 1900s. The Main Cabin also possesses the majority of its original multi-lite wood frame window units. The building now rests on a concrete foundation to ensure the survivability of the structure.

A visitor from the 1920s or 1930s would easily recognize the cabin not only by appearance, but by the historic integrity of its interior and exterior construction components. The cross-gable roof continues to be covered with cedar shingles and the internal brick chimney and exposed interior purlins and ridge pole remain. The top of the chimney is now covered with a metal hood from which extends a metal stovepipe. While a second chimney no longer remains, evidence of its existence is visible in the arched pass way/storage area between the bunk room and the dining room.

The flagpole, post-and-pole corral, and ditch, remain in their historic locations. The placement of the corral a fair distance north of the Main Cabin illustrates the desire to keep horses and animals at a distance from the residential unit.

Integrity of location, feeling, association, and setting remain strong as the area remains much as it did throughout the existence of the station. The Main Cabin continues to serve as the focal point of the property as it has since its construction. Despite the loss of several buildings, the general layout remains reflecting its use as a ranger station from the early 1900s through the mid-1920s through the early 1960s. The surrounding vegetation continues to impart the historic rural setting and isolation of the property. The circulation pattern, what it is, remains the same as access is only via a dirt road from the north.

Today, only the refurbished and stabilized historic cabin, flagpole, irrigation ditch, and last remnants of corrals share the grassy valley floor with the recently installed outhouse.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

CONSERVATION

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1908-1970

Significant Dates

1908
1943

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Unknown

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Sage Creek Ranger Station is eligible for listing in the NRHP under Criterion A for its association with administrative activities of the Forest Service from 1908 to 1970. Ranger district headquarters are representative of USDA Forest Service management policies and of the aesthetics that guided the agency's improvements program. Although use of the Station was gradually downgraded in 1943 to that of an administrative property for the Beartooth District of the Custer National Forest, the Station continued to be used by the Forest Service.

The Sage Creek Ranger Station is also eligible for listing under Criterion C. The Main Cabin stands as a good example of a Rustic vernacular style building assembled for use during the fledgling days of the United States Forest Service. Incorporating a prior existing building, the Main Cabin stands as an early Forest Service administrative building assembled using not only locally available materials, but possibly, already constructed buildings attached to an existing anchor. The Main Cabin represents the type of building and the construction methods necessitated by the lack of funding for the fledgling agency at the time.

The period of significance dates from 1908 to 1970. This period captures the Station's most intensive use, followed by its subsequent demotion to, though still important, administrative site used mostly seasonally by the United States Forest Service. Although the earliest portion of the Sage Creek Ranger Station dates to 1892, little documentation regarding its use at this time was found. The beginning of the period of significance, 1908, marks the date when the property was withdrawn for use as an administrative facility, and the earliest use of the existing 1892 cabin by the Forest Service. The significant date of 1943 marks when property was downgraded from a ranger station to that of an administrative facility for the Beartooth District of the Custer National Forest. The end of the period of significance, 1970, denotes the end of the historic period.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The Sage Creek Ranger Station is significant at the local level, in the area of *Conservation*, for its role as an administrative facility for the Sage Creek Ranger District of the Beartooth National Forest from 1908 to 1970. On January 8, 1908, the Secretary of the Interior withdrew 160.4 acres for the Sage Creek Ranger Station, and the site became the administrative headquarters of the Pryor Mountain Ranger District #5 of the Beartooth National Forest.¹³ The ranger station, that includes a 1892-constructed portion, is one of four original stations established on the nascent 1908 Beartooth National Forest, which were reportedly all "centrally located" for the administration of homestead and mining claims, surveys, local timber sales, and Forest Service

¹³ Extracted from PowerPoint *Sage Creek Cabin*, supplied by the Custer-Gallatin National Forest.

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grazing policy on the Beartooth National Forest.¹⁴ Use of this structure was gradually downgraded in 1943 to that of an administrative property for the Beartooth District of the Custer National Forest.

As noted in the context on Forest Service-owned buildings within Region 1, “the significance of administrative properties lies in their ability to evoke a connection between the historical period of Forest Service development and the present.”¹⁵ The Main Cabin at the Sage Creek Ranger Station, with its original section constructed in 1892 for use as a cattle/horse ranch line cabin, is representative of an acknowledged need for Forest Service buildings during this early formative period immediately following the elimination of the Pryor Mountain region from the Crow Indian reservation.

Under Criterion C, it stands as the earliest administrative building in the Pryor Mountains still in use, embodying the distinctive characteristics of a type and method of construction. The over 100-year-old vernacular log cabin continues to retain its structural and historical integrity as a well-preserved example of hewn\seen log structures typical of the late 19th and early 20th century’s rural western culture that stood as the administrative center of the Pryor Mountain Ranger District #5. The one-story, “L”-shaped, log building exhibits at least three major episodes of construction. The west wing, built in 1892, served as a cattle ranch line cabin up until January of 1908.¹⁶ During the 1920s, the north wing and corner kitchen section were added, possibly acquired from elsewhere.¹⁷ An open porch with concrete floor and low concrete wall (located on the northwest side) and the kitchen area (southeast corner) were constructed at approximately the same time.¹⁸

Throughout much of its existence as a Forest Service resource, the Sage Creek Ranger Station served as an anchor to all activities that took place in the immediate region.

Early History of the Sage Creek and Pryor Mountain Area

An encapsulated history of the region associated with the Sage Creek Ranger Station is covered well in the locally familiar and often cited publication, “*A General Historical Survey of the Pryor Mountains*” written by David Harvey for the Bureau of Land Management, Billings, Montana, in 1974.¹⁹ Conversational in tone, it provides a colorful background to the early history of the

¹⁴ USDA Forest Service, *The Beartooth National Forest: Its Resources, and Its Value and Relation to the Public*, 1912, on file at the Custer Gallatin National Forest Office, Billings, MT.

¹⁵ Janene Caywood, James McDonald, and Theodore Catton, *Evaluation of Region 1 Forest Service-Owned Buildings for Eligibility to the National Register of Historic Places*. Missoula, MT: United States Department of Agriculture, Region 1 Forest Service, 1991, p. 116.

¹⁶ File *SageCreekRS-1931-Narrative.tif* as provided by the Custer-Gallatin National Forest.

¹⁷ Photo *1920s.jpg* as provided by the Custer-Gallatin National Forest, showing the porch in place and the new south wing construction.

¹⁸ File *SageCreekCabinHSE-2004.doc* as provided by the Custer-Gallatin National Forest

¹⁹ David W. Harvey, *A General Historical Survey of the Pryor Mountains*, (Billings: Bureau of Land Management, 1974). The report was commissioned as part of a Resources Development Internship Program, financed during 1974 by grants from the Economic Development Administration, Education Division, HEW; Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities, National Science Foundation and by more

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Pryor Mountains and Sage Creek area. Some of the paragraphs from the report presented immediately below are selected from and condensed in content from the full text in the Hardy report. For the full chapter presentations condensed immediately below, please see "Additional Information" at the end of Section 8.

I. Early History and General Description of the Pryor Mountains

The Pryor Mountains are located in southeastern Montana with a small portion of its foothills in Wyoming. They are west of the Big Horns, and east of the Clarks Fork Valley. The history of the Pryors does not stretch back very far, in written record terminology anyhow. In fact, the history of all of Montana is not very old. The historic period in Montana only begins with the Lewis and Clark expedition (1805-1806). This is not to say that other trappers and explorers had not previously penetrated the territory of what is known today as Montana. But it was not until Lewis and Clark that a definitive historical account was recorded about the Upper Missouri country and the mountains to the south. Of the mountains to the south, I am most concerned about the Pryors.

"Among traders who penetrated the country west of the Missouri River prior to the 19th century were the French Canadian Verendyre brothers."²⁰ They were obsessively concerned with locating a waterway through the interior of the country to the Pacific Ocean, during the years of 1742-1743. Their exact route through the Yellowstone Valley, and the Big Horn Basin, has been opened to much speculation. One source has them leaving the Missouri River country and "turning south to the Yellowstone they passed through Pryor Gap to the Shoshone River and followed up the Big Horn as far as the Wind River Mountains."²¹

The Pryors, and Pryor Creek, obtained their "civilized" names after Sergeant Nathaniel Pryor of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Pryor is most known for his misfortune while camping on Pryor Creek, north of the mountains. Crow Indians stole all of his horses during the night!...

The Crows looked upon the Pryors as a spiritual place. It was a place to be revered and respected. Crow Indian Henry Old Coyote spoke of the earth (the Pryors) as our "mother": "We come from it and we return to it. The earth is our commissary for food, fuel, shelter and tools. "²²

than one hundred and fifty community agencies throughout the west. Manuscript found online at <https://archive.org/details/generalhistorica1974harv/page/54>, accessed October 2019.

²⁰ Thomas Keyhole, *Montana Prehistory*, (Pamphlet, Billings Public Library Clippings File).

²¹ David J. Wasden, *From Beaver to Oil*, (Cheyenne, Wyoming: Pioneer Printing and Stationery Company, 1973), p. 8.

²² University of Missouri Interpretive Study Team, "Interpretive Plan for the Custer National Forest Lands in the Pryor Mountains of South-Central Montana," Billings: Custer National Forest Headquarters, Historical Files, March 1972, p. 6.

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Lawrence L. Loendorf made an archaeological study of the Pryors in 1969, which indicated that many of the mountains' caves showed little indication of Indian habitation. "Lack of water was one main reason why many of the caves were not occupied by prehistoric peoples."²³ Joe Medicine Crow, Crow Indian archaeologist, claims his people never occupied the caves. When the Crows came to the area about 300 years ago, members of the lost "Sheepeater Tribe" were occupying some of the caves.²⁴

Other evidence of Indian habitation of the Pryors is the existence of many "Tipi Rings" in the area. Tipi rings are stone circles that were supposedly used to hold down the skin of a conical shaped habitational structure. But some rings are too small or too large for that use. "Also, many rings lack other evidence of human habitation, such as artifacts, use of fire, floors, and great distances from wood and water. Therefore, some of the rings must have been used for ceremonial purposes."²⁵

During the period of fur trading and trapping, from the early to mid-1800's, good relations generally prevailed between the Crows and the trappers. One of the first trappers to explore the Big Horn Basin, via the Pryor Mountains, was John Colter. A member of the Lewis and Clark expedition, Colter gained release from the expedition on its return trip through Montana in 1807. Passing through Pryor Gap during the winter of 1807-1808, Colter explored the Big Horn Basin and eventually went on to discover the wonders of what is known today as Yellowstone National Park.²⁶...

After Colter's exploration, the Pryor Gap provided a gateway for trappers on their way to the Big Horn Basin. Clashes inevitably occurred between the different fur companies. The independent or "free" trappers competed against the big fur company of the time, the American Fur Company. A group of these independents entered the Big Horn Basin from the south in the fall of 1848. "They spent the fall months trapping the various streams between Wind River and Pryor Creek. They spent the winter in a small basin in the Pryor Mountains, which allotted them security and defense from the Indians."²⁷

The Indian and trapper explorations through the Gap gave way in later years to freight haulers. They hauled supplies between Billings and the Big Horn Basin via the Pryor gap. The railroad at the turn of the (last) century replace the freight haulers as the principal means of moving cargo and supplies from the Yellowstone Valley to the Big Horn basin.

Another route that connected the Yellowstone Valley and the Big Horn Basin was the "Bad Pass." It is located between the Pryors and the Big Horns, running along the west side of the Big Horn River. It was also known as the Sioux or Shoshone Trail. "This

²³ Ibid., p. 70.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Peterson, *"Pryor Mountain Area – Land of Legend, History and Mystery,"* p. 9.

²⁶ Pryor Gap is located just over five miles north of the Sage Creek Ranger Station.

²⁷ Wasden, *From Beaver to Oil*, p. 29.

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well-used route is now generally called “Bad Pass,” rather than Sioux Trail, because it describes the trail’s geography and its name does not imply use by only one group.”²⁸

“Bad Pass” was “a prehistoric and historic Indian trail, a trade route for mountain men, a cattle trail, a mail route to the Dryhead, and now an access to a recreation area.”²⁹ Two other significant trails that passed near the Pryor Mountain country were the Bozeman and Bridger Trails. Both were concerned in reaching the gold strikes in the mountains around Virginia City, in western Montana. Both trails opened up routes for trade and settlement in Montana. The first great wave of homesteaders into Montana came along these routes, with the Bozeman Trail being the most significant. Opened in the early 1860’s by John Bozeman, one of the routes taken by the caravans along the Bozeman came through the Pryors “along the Beauvois Creek in the Dryhead country, but did not cross the creek at initial contact, but followed an old Indian trail called the ‘Tepee Trail’ along the northern foothills of the Pryor Mountains to the Clarks Fork River.”³⁰ The Bozeman Trail crossed near the present town of Pryor, just north of the Pryor Gap.

Trapper and explorer Jim Bridger advocated a shorter, easier and safer route towards the western Montana gold fields. To avoid the Sioux nation, he reportedly went through the Big Horn Basin, and then northwest up through present-day Frannie and Warren; and then took the route between Bowler and Bridger, passing one mile south of the present town of Bridger. But this route has been challenged. Dick Colberg of Billings claims that possibly “the Bridger Trail, when west of Red Pryor Mountain, cut northeast through Pryor Gap and joined the Bozeman Trail and then proceeded west to present-day Edgar.”³¹ The 1868 surveyor general’s map seems to confirm the possibility of an alternate Bridger Trail through the Gap.

The migratory rush towards the gold field in western Montana had its effect on the Pryors and eastern Montana. Wagon trains and travelers to western Montana needed protection, hence, the presence of the U. S. Army in eastern Montana. Protection (increased after Custer’s defeat in 1876) from the Indians offered an inducement to some westward-bound settlers to go no further and to put down roots in the eastern part of the territory. Hence, the large Crow Reservation was pressured to release some of its land for white settlement. “Between 1891-1904, the Crows signed three important agreements with the United States. Two of these agreements reduced acreage of the reservation in return for which the Indians received money to underwrite needed capital improvements. The third agreement allowed the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad to build tracks across the Reservation.”³²

²⁸ Loendorf, *The Results of the Archaeological Survey*, p. 112.

²⁹ Loendorf, *The Results of the Archaeological Survey*, p. 111.

³⁰ Lorenz J. McIntyre, *The Bridger and Bozeman Trails*, Midland Review, October 5, 1939, p. 10.

³¹ Stuart W. Conner, *Unpublished Manuscript on the Bridger Trail*, Billings Public Library, Clippings File, August 19, 1969, p. 1.

³² Edwin Bearss, *Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area, Vol. II*, U. S. Department of the Interior and the National Park Service, 1970, p. 359.

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One of these agreements, ratified in Congress on March 3, 1891, opened up most of the Pryor Mountains to homesteaders. Misunderstandings developed concerning the residual rights of individual Indians in the area ceded to the United States. Many white “claim jumpers” trespassed on land held by these Indians. On October 15, 1892, President Benjamin Harrison issued a proclamation declaring land ceded by the March 3, 1891, agreement, and not reserved to the Indians, was open to settlement. But since the area had not been surveyed, these “claim jumpers” swarmed in and took up Indian as well as government land. This naturally led to hot tempers and nervous guns, ending up with one Crow being shot to death! Harmony eventually came about when the area was partly surveyed and Indian allotments identified.³³

With the opening of the “ceded strip,” homesteads mushroomed in the Pryors, especially along Sage Creek, in the Bowler Flats, on Crooked Creek, and in the Dryhead.³⁴

David Hardy also provided a detailed discussion of the wild horse population in the Pryor Mountains. A condensed discussion derived from Hardy’s report follows.³⁵ For Harvey’s full in-depth discussion on Pryor Mountain wild horses, please see the “Additional Information” at the end of Section 8.

Wild Horses in the Pryor Mountains

At the time of Harvey’s report in 1974, the wild horse population in the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range was estimated to be 120. The horse has occupied the area for several hundred years, beginning with their introduction by the Spanish, and later acquisition by the Northern Plains Indian Tribes, including the Crow.

The horse proliferated in the Pryor Mountain area as a result of the lack of fencing as the natural barriers of the area often curtailed animal movement. However, many horses from local ranches often escaped and joined with the wild horse populations in the area. In addition, the harsh conditions of the depression era forced many ranches to release their horse into the wild, increasing the wild horse population even further.

In the 1960s, the BLM undertook the task to reduce the wild horse population, which they felt competed with the livestock for forage, and damaged the local plant life. The attempt to cull the horse population, however, met opposition from locals in the area. One family, the Tilletts, proved especially protective of the horses, claiming all that ran east of Crooked Creek. Negotiations between the BLM and the locals continued for several years with little positive outcome and claims of the BLM catering to special interest groups. With little progress, the case went before the U.S. District Court in Washington D.C., with the eventual result of the

³³ Ibid., p. 360.

³⁴ Bowler and Bowler Flats are about eight miles west of Sage Creek Ranger Station.

³⁵ David W. Harvey, *A General Historical Survey of the Pryor Mountains*, (Billings: Bureau of Land Management, 1974), manuscript found online at <https://archive.org/details/generalhistorica1974harv/page/54>, accessed October 2019.

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establishment of the 32,000-acre Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range, located in the southeast corner of the Pryor Mountains, about 15 miles southeast of the Sage Creek Ranger Station. The welfare of the horse population fell to both the BLM and the U.S. Forest Service.

Harvey, in Chapter IV of his manuscript, detailed well the early settlement and events that occurred in the Pryor Mountain area near the Sage Creek Ranger Station. That portion of his report is provided in its entirety below, with added footnotes providing locational and distance information regarding place names called-out by Hardy to the Sage Creek Ranger Station.

IV. Early Settlements – Upper Sage Creek and the Northern Pryors

Circumvention of the law in the form of cattle and horse rustling, conflicts between sheep and cattlemen, and harassment of the Indians, existed during the early settlement days along Upper Sage Creek.

During the late 1800's, a notorious horse thief and outlaw, "Teton" Jackson, hid out in a cave above Sage Creek, known today as the "Teton Jack" Cave. The cave is located on the Crow Reservation about 2 ½ miles west of the Sage Creek Ranger Station on the north side of Sage Creek and the road. "Teton" was reported to have stolen hundreds of horses and killed an unknown number of men, including several Deputy U. S. Marshalls in Idaho and Utah. Frank Canton, a U. S. Marshall in Buffalo, Wyoming, who once arrested "Teton," called him "a most dangerous and vicious character." Bert Schwend, of Upper Sage Creek, thought that "Teton" once held up in the cave for a month. "In May, 1888, Teton was arrested nearby while driving a band of fifty horses across the Crow Reservation."³⁶

Grazing of cattle on the Pryors became quite extensive after the "ceded strip" was opened to settlement in 1892.³⁷ Soon thereafter, "persons from considerable distance began to drive their stock into the area. They not only crowded the local residents, but in some cases took their grazing lands away from them."³⁸ Incensed natives got together to form vigilante groups to keep out these intruders. The vigilantes were successful in their pursuit, but left themselves criminally liable for some acts that took place. All this changed in 1907 when the U. S. Forest Service came into the Pryors. They gave local residents protection, reducing the temptation for some to take the law into their own hands.

Just inside the national forest boundary, north of the road, are the remains of a rock dam on Sage Creek.³⁹ The purpose of the dam was to irrigate certain farms in the Bowler Flats, west of the Pryors. But the dam was never put to that use. Stories conflict on the

³⁶ H. M. Shoebottom, *Sage Creek Cave – Outlaws Hide Out*, Billings Gazette, Sunday Magazine, September 4, 1966, p. 1.

³⁷ Which no doubt led to the initial construction of the Sage Creek Ranger Station that served as a line cabin.

³⁸ *Fact Sheet on the Pryor Mountains*, Custer National Forest Headquarters, Billings, Montana, Historical Files, p. 1.

³⁹ About two miles north of the Sage Creek Ranger Station.

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reasons for its nonfunctioning. One source told me the builders, Datliff Thormahlen and Jim Polly, simply ran out of money. Another source claims the builders could not get enough dirt to line it. Bert Schwend thought the Bents of Bowler Flats, claiming entire water rights on Sage Creek, blew the bottom of the dam out! Although no proof exists that can substantiate this accusation, fights over water rights were pretty common on Bowler Flats. During the twenties and thirties, water was a scarce commodity on the flats. But Frank Clift of Columbus, former mail clerk on the Toluca-Cody railroad line that ran through the Pryors, said the Bents did not blow up the dam. "The water just sank below the dam!"

Along the same Sage Creek Road occurred an ambush of Crow Indians by a couple of local cattlemen. Occurring around 1917 or 1918, the ambush happened at the "Battleground," the bend in the road where Sage Creek and the canyon wall come close to each other.⁴⁰ The old Fenner ranch, now owned by Claude Lewis, is right around the bend from where the ambush took place. Stories vary on the circumstances that led to the ambush...

Cattle would wander onto the reservation, and the white man would have to pay \$1.00 to \$1.25 a head to get them back. Some claim that the Crows deliberately drove the cattle onto the reservation. Others claim that some ranchers deliberately ran their cattle on Indian land to gain extra grazing territory. Any how, Toots Brown and Mike Wrote, incensed over the "cattle levy" charged by the Crows, waited one day atop the hills above "Battleground" bend to "square" things with the Indians. After the shooting was over, three Indians laid dead and one wounded. Whites in the Pryors that night must have been a little jittery, wondering whether the Crows would retaliate. Jim Kelsey of Crooked Creek, Pat Marchant's great-uncle, told his wife Edna (later married to Frank Anderson) what happened on Sage Creek. Then, to scare her, he told her the "Indians were on the warpath." Edna did not wait around. She grabbed a blanket and went out and slept for the night on a nearby ridge, afraid of the supposedly revengeful Crows. Meanwhile, husband Jim stayed inside nice and warm, laughing quietly to himself.

Anyway, the Crows did not retaliate. Toots Brown and Mike Wrote subsequently were arrested and convicted. Both went to Fort Leavenworth, but Toots only served around five years because of his age, being only 17 at the time of the ambush. Mike was released years later because of illness.

Art Graham of Bridger told me that his father was nearby when the ambush took place. He had warned Mike Wrote that he would be arrested if he did any shooting. Toots was a good friend of Art Graham. Art told me that other people were involved in the shooting, taking shots at the Indians from the creek bed. They were never caught. Art did not know their names, but he would not have told me, even if he knew!

⁴⁰ Three miles north of Sage Creek Ranger Station.

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Along the road to Big Ice Cave, there sits the remnants of a cabin, not too far from the road's intersection with the Crooked Creek and Sage Creek Roads.⁴¹ Hugh Kelsey, older brother of Jim Kelsey, built that cabin in the early 1900's. "Hugh, like many cowboys of his time, augmented his income by doing a little rustling."⁴² Pretty soon he was able to set up his own ranch down on Lower Crooked Creek. His cattle rustling eventually put him at odds with the law. This necessitated a quick exit to Canada, sometime before 1910. No one knows why Hugh built that cabin up along the road there. But, according to the Marchants, Hugh must have had some interesting guests stopping by at the cabin. One guest carved his name on the cabin. It was "Kid Curry," who belonged to the Butch Cassidy gang! The name is no longer there, carved out by some souvenir hunter.

Up above the Kelsey cabin in the timber, there are the remains of an old cabin built for "Ma" Strong in the early 1900's.⁴³ No reasons could be found on why it was built.

Hugh Kelsey was not the only one accused of cattle rustling. A famous rustling trial took place during the early days in Red Lodge. B. M. (Bud) Phelps and a William Sherrin were charged for attempting to rustle around 55 head of cattle belonging to C. A. Dana of Dryhead. Dana's cattle usually grazed around the northern boundary of the forest preserve. But one day they were spotted 20-30 miles from their accustomed range, heading down Crooked Creek near Demijohn Flat. Phelps, along with Mrs. Phelps and Sherrin, were seen in the vicinity on horseback. They said they had been in charge of a party of three dudes from Bud's parents' (Mr. and Mrs. Charles Phelps) Lone Wolf Ranch in Dryhead. They protested to the posse, made up of ranchers from Sage Creek, that they knew nothing of the cattle herd nearby. Ultimately, Phelps and Sherrin were found not guilty.

Sage Creek was first known to the Indians as "Yellow Willow." Art Graham of Bridger claims his father (A. P. Graham) was one of the first settlers along Upper Sage Creek, arriving there around 1895. In 1896-97, A. P. Graham hauled mine timbers from the Pryors to Bridger where they were used to shore up mines. He also had the first mining claim on West Pryor. Art says the family still has around 2,000 acres of claims in the Pryors. But people with small claims, like themselves, cannot afford to mine them. He said, "Anaconda is just waiting for people who have claims to die off!"

During the early days, there were a lot of sawmills and lumbering operations in the Pryors. The Schwends of Upper Sage Creek built a sawmill not too far from the present-day Schwend Ranch.⁴⁴

Bert Schwend also had a sawmill at Tibbs Hollow on Crooked Creek.⁴⁵ The hollow acquired its name from a cattleman from Cowley named Tibbs. He used to run sheep up

⁴¹ Less than five miles east of Sage Creek Ranger Station.

⁴² Crosby, *History and Folklore*, p. 1.

⁴³ Less than five miles east of Sage Creek Ranger Station.

⁴⁴ About 2 miles west north-west of the Sage Creek Ranger Station.

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there in the early 1900's. Another sawmill was built by Stevens. He bought the Spencer homestead (Spencer had homesteaded it in 1909) on Sage Creek in 1918. A sawmill existed there for many years. Heman (sic) Smith later bought the place and leased out the sawmill, but it was used very little. Bill and Nancy Poole live there now. The sawmill is no longer in operation. Homer Wilhelm of Pryor said the Stevens' sawmill was also a cabinet factory. Homer should know, he used to haul lumber from there back in 1926. Bert Schwend used to haul lumber from the Harvey Ray (who once owned the present-day Schwend ranch) sawmill. It was located less than one-half of a mile up from Hugh Kelsey's cabin on the road to the Big Ice Cave. Bert Schwend said it was built sometime during the mid-twenties. Today, little remains of the old sawmill.

Dick Godfrey of Cowley said his father used to work at the Schow brothers sawmill. It was located near Wyoming Creek and Crooked Creek. Later on, the area where the sawmill once stood was used as a campground. Today, there is no evidence left of either. Dick Godfrey, only eleven years old at the time, used to haul lumber down to Cowley with his older brother. The lumber was used to build the old schoolhouse there.

A number of logging operations took place back then on what is called "Tie Flats," located on the ridge west of where the Crooked Creek Road begins.⁴⁶ The men who worked there were called "Tiehackers," because they built the ties for the railroad. Bert Schwend thought there were 200 or more "Tiehackers" up there at one time. Their main source of entertainment, according to Bert was a bar and a "flop house," owned by Baxter Zachery. Dick Godfrey thought the only settlement on "Tie Flats" consisted of tents. His older brother used to haul lumber from there around 1912-1913. Heman Smith felt that the only building on "Tie Flats" was a cook shack. "There wasn't a saloon; everything was just out of your own bottle."

Other early Sage Creek residents included the Shivers and Cummings, both whose ranches were close together on Upper Sage Creek. Today, the Schwends own both of these ranches. The Cummings had the first Post Office in that area. "It was established in January of 1910, but closed up operations a short time afterwards, in April, 1911. Blanche Cummings was postmaster. In July of 1915, a Post Office was established at the Shriver Ranch, with Nettie T. Shriver as Postmaster."⁴⁷ It must have remained in existence until at least the thirties, because Homer Wilhelm's brother, Garth, hauled mail from Shriver in the early 1930's.

Just outside the Forest Service boundary sits Indian Springs cabin. It is on the south side of Sage Creek and the road.⁴⁸ It was reportedly built by Crow Indians working for the

⁴⁵ Two miles southeast of the Sage Creek Ranger Station.

⁴⁶ Four miles to the southwest of Sage Creek Ranger Station.

⁴⁷ Lucius R. Maryott, *The Land of Shining Mountains – A Short History of Carbon County*, Carbon County News, February 26, 1970, p. 4. The Shriver, Schwend, and Cumming ranches are all located less than 2 miles from Sage Creek Ranger Station.

⁴⁸ About one mile northwest of the Sage Creek Ranger Station.

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CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) during the early 1930's. It was used as an Indian Police Station for a while. The spring is the "last chance" for clear, cold, spring water, if one is heading west towards the arid Bowler Flats.

If one turns north at Indian Springs, one would be heading towards the one-time "Cheese Factory," reportedly in operation between 1916-1918. It was opposite the remains of Snyder's Commissary, on the Crow Reservation. The owners used to make cheese from sheep and goat's milk. It was never too successful. One source claims that the "winters were too tough for them." Dick Godfrey once worked nearby as a sheep foreman for C. A. Lewis. He feels that the proprietors were not too careful in making sure the fecal remains of the sheep did not end up in the cheese!

As it was in the early days, raising livestock is the main occupation today on Sage Creek.

[End Edited Block Citation - "A General Historical Survey of the Pryor Mountains"]

Developmental History of the Sage Creek Ranger Station

Based on the above historical perspective, the Sage Creek Ranger Station setting and structure is representative of the role that the ranching frontier played in the settlement of the Pryor Mountain region during a time of re-definition of land and its uses. While settlement, ranching, and logging played important roles in the history of the Sage Creek and greater Pryor Mountain area, another important player was set to enter the stage in the form of the embryonic beginnings of what is to become later known as the United States Forest Service.

The level of active federal management of the forest land within and around the Sage Creek Ranger Station began during the first decade of the twentieth century, following the creation of the Forest Service. On September 4, 1902, President Theodore Roosevelt created the Absaroka Forest Reserve via presidential proclamation. The following year, the Absaroka Forest Reserve became part of the larger Yellowstone Forest Reserve that occupied lands in Montana as well as the bordering states of Idaho and Wyoming. In 1903 Special Forest Superintendent A. A. Anderson created four districts, the Shoshone, Wind River, Absaroka, and Teton, within the Preserve for management purposes.⁴⁹

The newly-created Absaroka Division was located entirely within the state of Montana and consisted of more than 1.3 million acres of land.⁵⁰ A 1904 publication on the Absaroka Division noted lands within the Beartooth Plateau had historically been used for cattle and sheep grazing, timber cutting, and lime quarrying. In 1905, Congress passed the Transfer Act, creating the Bureau of Forestry and transferring management of the forests from the General Land Office (GLO) within the Department of the Interior (DOI), to the Bureau of Forestry within the

⁴⁹ Greta Rayle, Helena Ruter, Mike Bergstrom, Halcyon LaPoint, and John Boughton, *Rock Creek Ranger Station Historic District* National Register nomination, listed October 17, 2016, NR #16000729.

⁵⁰ John L. Leiberg, *Forest Conditions in the Absaroka Division of the Yellowstone Forest Reserve, Montana* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904, p. 10), on file at the Custer Gallatin National Forest Office, Billings, MT.

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Department of Agriculture.⁵¹ With this action, the Yellowstone Forest Reserve came under the purview of the new agency. The creation of the Bureau of Forestry, later renamed the Forest Service, saw the beginnings of federal effort to exercise greater control over the reserved forest lands. As part of this process, the old Forest Reserves slowly evolved into a new network of National Forests that became smaller and more actively managed than their predecessors.⁵²

In 1908, the dissolution of the broader Yellowstone Forest Reserve occurred and created seven separate forests (see table below). The Pryor Mountain National Forest, created from the Pryor Mountain Forest Reserve in 1907, combined with the Beartooth National Forest at this time. The same year, the Custer National Forest was developed from isolated tracts of land in southeastern Montana and northwestern South Dakota, previously known as the Otter National Forest. The Custer National Forest was comprised of 590,720 acres with its headquarters located in Miles City, Montana.

National forests created from the Yellowstone Forest Reserve on July 1, 1908.⁵³

Forest name	Location	Acreage	Notes
Absaroka	Montana	980,440	Originally established in September 4, 1902; consolidated with Yellowstone National Forest in 1903; reestablished as a separate forest in 1908.
Beartooth	Montana	685,293	
Bonneville	Wyoming	1,627,840	Became the Washakie National Forest in 1917.
Shoshone	Wyoming	1,689,680	Known today as the Shoshone-Washakie National Forest.
Targhee	Idaho & Wyoming	1,479,320	Approximately 75 percent of the forest was, and continues to remain, in Idaho.
Teton	Wyoming	1,991,200	Known today as Bridger-Teton National Forest.
Wyoming	Wyoming	976,320	

The new Beartooth National Forest consisted of lands within Montana and included the eastern portion of the former Absaroka Division of the Yellowstone Forest Reserve, as well as the lands of the former Pryor Mountain National Forest, a separate forest 35 miles to the east, created in

⁵¹ Robert D. Baker, Robert S. Maxwell, Victor H. Treat, and Henry C. Dethloff, *Timeless Heritage: A History of the Forest Service in the Southwest* (Washington, D.C.: USDA Forest Service, 1988).

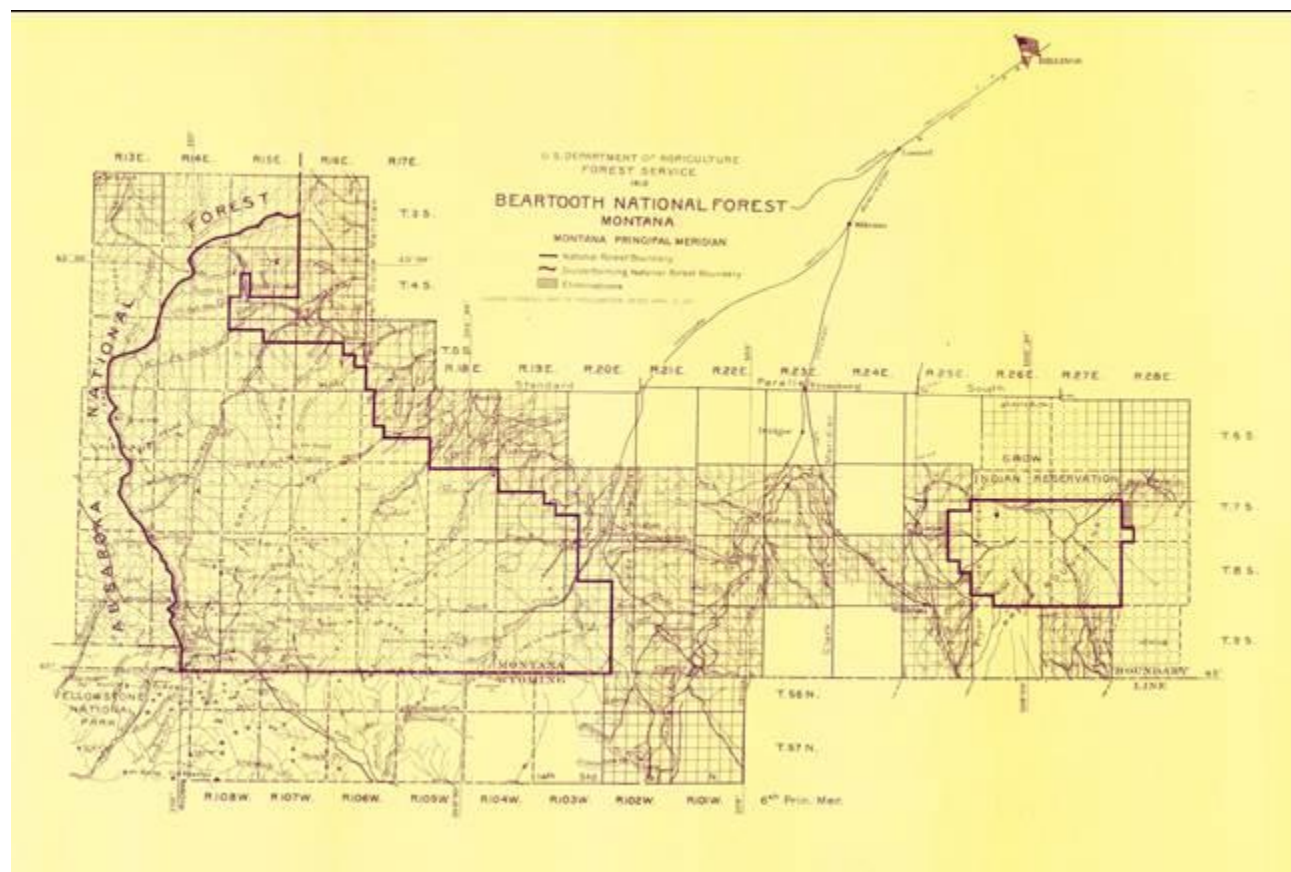
⁵² Dennis Roth and Gerald W. Williams, *The Forest Service in 1905*, 2003, found at <http://www.fs.fed.us/newcentury/1905%20Renaming%20the%20Forest%20Service.doc>, accessed May 21, 2015; Greta Rayle, Helena Ruter, Mike Bergstrom, Halcyon LaPoint, and John Boughton, *Rock Creek Ranger Station Historic District* National Register nomination, listed October 17, 2016, NR #16000729.

⁵³ Richard Davis, ed. *Encyclopedia of American Forest Conservation History*, Vol. II (New York: Macmillian Publishing Company, 1983).

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1906 (see figure below).⁵⁴ The Beartooth National Forest encompassed 685,293 acres of land and included the Beartooth Plateau and West Fork of Rock Creek. The Beartooth Forest was separated into four management districts including the Pryor Mountain District, Rock Creek District, Stillwater District, and Rosebud District.



Forest Service map of the Beartooth National Forest, 1912, depicting the forest boundaries with the discontinuous Pryor Mountains boundary located to the east (Image courtesy of CGNF Billings Office).

Sage Creek Ranger Station Takes Shape

From an early date the necessity of permanent improvements on the national forests was discussed. Henry Graves, appointed Chief Forester in 1910, issued goals which included the facilitation of forest protection from fire, administration of the business of the forest, and development of the forest's resources. These three objectives directed how the various projects in each forest's permanent improvements plans were prioritized (USDA 1911). These categories followed certain language in the Transfer Act, which charged the Secretary of Agriculture with the "protection, administration, improvement, and extension" of the national forests.

⁵⁴ USDA Forest Service, *Beartooth National Forest Map*, 1912, on file at the Custer Gallatin National Forest Billings Office, Billings, 1912.

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Improvements relating to forest protection received first priority. Administrative buildings received second priority. Graves recognized that quarters were essential for the efficient transaction of business, safeguarding government property, and public convenience. However, construction of new ranger stations was permissible only where no other accommodations were available.⁵⁵

By the time the Forest Service withdrew the Sage Creek Ranger Station site in August of 1908 for use as one of the permanent stations on what was then the Beartooth National Forest, the earliest portion of the Main Cabin (the west wing) had been abandoned, no longer serving as a cattle ranch line shelter. The use of the existing structure as the anchor of the Main Cabin fit well under the Forest Service directive that the district headquarters were “located with the idea of placing the station where it is most handy to the center of work and where it may be easily reached or communicated with.”⁵⁶ The use of an existing building to serve as the ranger station at Sage Creek also followed suit toward the goal of not constructing a new station, if avoidable. Soon after the acquisition of the property, the original barn (since removed) and corral were constructed.

Other early district headquarters for the Beartooth National Forest were located at Rock Creek, Fishtail Creek, upper Stillwater, and Myers Creek. Early Forest Service activities predominately involved the explanation and enforcement of range management policy at a time when such federal control was both a welcome infusion of law into an increasingly lawless competition for resources and a direct challenge to traditional western attitudes towards the land and its resources.⁵⁷

After being proclaimed in 1906, and transferred to the jurisdiction of the newly formed Beartooth National Forest in 1908, the range originally opened to timber use from both Montana and Wyoming. The mountain island, the local appellation for the Pryors, was first reserved and then immediately opened to homesteaders under the Forest Homestead Act of 1906, while stockmen competed for resources.⁵⁸ Resources became strained as confrontations occurred between homesteaders, ranchers, and the resource manager.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ For a detailed history of Region 1, please see Janene Caywood, *Flathead National Forest Backcountry Administrative Facilities National Register Nomination*, listed 12/17/2014, NR# 14001047.

⁵⁶ This information comes from a document found in the FS Region One Archives in Missoula, from the general history file for the Beartooth National Forest. The document is written by Glen Smith and entitled “The Beartooth National Forest, Its Resources, Its value and Relation to the Public.” This document displays clear date; however, a note on the copy xeroxed from the Custer NF Supervisor’s Office (catalog #1680-106) indicates preparation of the report occurred during the winter of 1911-1912.

⁵⁷ HRA-24CB0086-Sage Creek Work Center.pdf, National Register Nomination written by J. Bolton & A. Hubber, Research Assistants, Historical Research Associates, Inc., in 1990. p. 4.

⁵⁸ Colloquially referred to as the “mountain island,” the Pryors received this sobriquet because it stands alone, unconnected by altitude to either the Big Horn range or the Beartooths. Primarily limestone, the Pryor Mountain ‘island’ has a distinction of never having been glaciated.

⁵⁹ The Pryor Mountain Homestead Landscape, Victor Konrad, 1984.

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As the Forest Service slowly grew during the early 1900s, it experimented with different methods to manage the vast quantity and diverse character of lands under its jurisdiction. On the Beartooth National Forest several challenges existed, each with its own measure of importance, facing each individual station and its staff.

The limited homesteading that occurred in the Pryor Range was primarily driven by immigrants arriving by way of the Clark's Fork Valley of the Yellowstone, located to the west of the range. Associated homesteaders represented a variety of ethnic backgrounds and were generally families that immigrated to the west earlier, now taking advantage of new lands open for homesteading. Records from 1912 indicate 19 homestead filings on forest land, primarily located along Sage Creek, with two filings on Big Pryor Mountain, and one in the Dryhead area.⁶⁰

Railroads contributed to the influx of people not only as a means of delivering them west, but also by the railroad's need for wooden ties upon which to place the rails. In 1912, sawmills continued to operate on the north fork of Pole Cat Creek and the head of Crooked Creek. In 1882, the town of Bowler, eight miles west of the Sage Creek Station, began its existence west of the Pryor Mountains along the stage and freight route that ran nearby. In 1901, the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy (CB & Q) Railroad began its service through a newly-founded Bowler, positioned along the tracks closer to the base of the mountains. The town came to sport a saloon, Post Office, allowing the mail and freight to be delivered by train, and a few stores in addition to the new homesteaders distributed across Bowler Flats. However, by 1911, the railroad pulled out, removing rail and ties, and when the land proved poor for crops, people soon followed.⁶¹

After the land transfer in 1908, the Sage Creek Ranger Station was staffed until its reassigned use in 1943 to an administrative property. In early 1908, Chief Engineer W. E. Herring of Washington advocated for the construction of "wagon roads, telephone trails, bridges and rangers' cabins" at a gathering of forestry officials of western states.⁶² This line of thought likely contributed to the initial occupation and following improvements to the Sage Creek Ranger Station.

In 1921 the station was used as a site to apply for grazing permits covering that year. The issuance of grazing permits required an understanding of potential grazing areas. To garner this knowledge, rangers spent a considerable amount of time inspecting the country where permits could be issued. This knowledge often allowed the rangers to dispense information regarding the locations of poisonous plant infestations to permittees. Field visits to the grazing areas by rangers occurred to conduct inspections of animal counts, locations of camps, forage conditions,

⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 19.

⁶¹ *A General Historical Survey of the Pryor Mountains*, David Harvey, BLM, Billings, Montana, 1964, p. 25.

⁶² *Transportation in Forests*, Billings Gazette, Billings, Montana, February 7, 1908, p. 6.

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and issues of concern such as investigating grazing trespass cases.⁶³ During the early 1900s, estimates of 50,000 sheep and 5,000 cattle were permitted on the Beartooth National Forest.⁶⁴

When the time for filing approached, announcements appeared in the newspapers directing interested parties where to go to complete paperwork. In the Pryors, interested parties were directed to the Sage Creek Ranger Station. It was required that the permits be applied for in person by January 20, 1921. R. T. Ferguson, Supervisor of the Beartooth Forest, directed District Rangers to staff their respective stations and additional sites to receive the applications. Guy O'Neil accepted the applications at the Sage Creek Schoolhouse at Shriver on January 7 from 1:00 to 5:00 o'clock; Sage Creek Ranger Station on January 8th from 1:00 to 5:00 o'clock; and then the post office at Bowler on January 9th from 8:00 o'clock until noon.⁶⁵ Ranger Guy O'Neil of the Pryor District remained at Sage Creek in February of 1923, when he again received grazing applications for "his territory."⁶⁶ While the wild horse population in the area hadn't yet achieved the size it would by the 1960s, it is likely the rangers who worked out of the Sage Creek Ranger Station also needed to address issues relating to their presence. Permits for logging likely occurred in the area following a similar protocol as the rangers also monitored logging operations, per Coster's journal.

Another important role of the rangers was to develop road and trail networks on the forest during the early 1900s. Such endeavors assisted access for back-country firefighters.⁶⁷ Some of this work entailed supervision of crews involved with trail construction and repair. Some districts hired seasonal employees for fire patrol. Rangers continually inspected their districts during fire season and, if needed, posted fire notices and warnings.⁶⁸ Marking trails and creek crossings was encouraged of all rangers; doing so benefited both the public who used the trails and new employees unfamiliar with the area.⁶⁹ These trails undoubtedly also served other benefits, timber sale administration, providing stock driveways, prospecting, and recreation.

Through a period of station improvements, the Sage Creek Ranger Station witnessed a few different occupants. While records are incomplete, some of the people stationed at Sage Creek Ranger Station are known, including Ranger Charles O. Williamson, "...administrative officer of the Pryor Mountain division of the Beartooth National Forest."⁷⁰ Ranger Williamson was

⁶³ *The Beartooth Forester*, September-October 1912, pp. 11, 14.

⁶⁴ USDA Forest Service, *The Beartooth National Forest: Its Resources, and Its Value and Relation to the Public*, 1912, pp. 7-8, on file at the Custer Gallatin National Forest Office, Billings, MT.

⁶⁵ *Requests for Grazing Permits in Beartooth Must be on January 20*, Billings Gazette, Billings, Montana, December 18, 1921, p. 3.

⁶⁶ *Forest Office Sets Grazing Applications, Rangers Will Receive Filings for Own Territories*, Billings Gazette, February 13, 1923, p. 3.

⁶⁷ USDA Forest Service, *The Beartooth National Forest: Its Resources, and Its Value and Relation to the Public*, 1912, p. 17, on file at the Custer Gallatin National Forest Office, Billings, MT. 17.

⁶⁸ *The Beartooth Forester*, June 1912, p. 11.

⁶⁹ *The Beartooth Forester*, March 1911, p. 7; *The Beartooth Forester*, February 1912, p. 16; *The Beartooth Forester*, September-October 1912, p. 2.

⁷⁰ *Returns to Station*, Billings Gazette, Billings, Montana, February 1, 1925, p. 5.

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stationed there from May 1, 1923 to March 15, 1929, often traveling to Red Lodge and Billings for management meetings. In 1929 he resigned to pursue "business in Billings and will deal in livestock and real estate."⁷¹ After his departure, a replacement was not immediately selected.⁷²

His replacement arrived as Raymond A. Coster, who first worked for the Forest Service on the Beartooth National Forest during the early 1900s as a District Ranger.⁷³ He briefly left the Forest Service on August 26, 1920, but was reinstated on March 20, 1923. He remained with the Beartooth National Forest for the next seven years, with the time from 1929-1931 stationed at the Sage Creek Ranger Station with his wife, Marjorie, and his daughter, Donna. It might have been during, or just before, Coster's tenure that the northern and corner additions of the Main Cabin were constructed. Some of the logs still bear scars from an earlier fire from the Tie Flats further up the mountain. Nine diaries consisting of daily entries that span 28 months, including the time spent at the Sage Creek Ranger Station, were shared with the Custer Gallatin National Forest and provide daily looks at life there. Ray's diary begins on April 1, 1929 and includes May 14, the Tuesday that he moved to Sage Creek.

"J. M. Waters arrived at R. L. Cr. Sta. at 6:00 am. We loaded his truck with equip. and he started for Sage Creek R. Sta. Started J Bergstrand this a.m. with horses for Pryor. I left R. L. Cr. Sta in personally owned car at 9:00 a.m. and drove to R. Lodge where I left family overtaking Waters there and going with him to Sage Cr. Sta. Dinner in Red Lodge arrived Sage Creek Sta. 3:00 pm. Unloaded, and returned to Luther at 9:30 p.m. dog tired. Bergstrand in Bridger all night. Supper and lodging no charge at Luther all night."⁷⁴

Ray almost immediately undertook making improvements to the Sage Creek Ranger Station upon his arrival. The station lacked many items, some which could prove vital for a smooth operation of a rural station. During May 27 of 1929, Ray commenced work on the installation of a telephone line.

"Worked all day cutting new telephone installation throughout into Sage Creek Ranger Station and soldered all connections. Rain and snow all day long, and very disagreeable out."⁷⁵

Other matters also required attention. In the midst of installing the telephone line across the landscape, Ray found time to take care of seasonal necessities. On June 3, 1929, Ray noted:

"Prepared and planted Sage Creek Station garden today."⁷⁶

⁷¹ *Returns to Station*, Billings Gazette, Billings, Montana, February 1, 1925, p. 5.

⁷² *Forest Ranger to Conduct Livestock Business in City*, Billings Gazette, Billings, Montana, March 16, 1929, p. 12.

⁷³ *Raymond A. Coster documents and photos* as provided by the Custer Gallatin National Forest, Billings Office, Billings, Montana, 2019.

⁷⁴ Diary of R. A. Coster, Forest Ranger, Vol. I, April 1 to June 30, 1929.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

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While work on the telephone line continued through much of Ray's early stay at the station, his focus often required addressing other matters too. Through mid-June, he troubleshooted the new telephone line across the landscape, but on Sunday, June 9th he was visited by the previous Ranger Charles O. "Windy" Williamson.

"At Sage Cr. Sta. all day attending to personal jobs about headquarters. Former ranger "Windy Williamson" here for a two hour talk fest, and to remove the remainder of his "40 years gatherings."⁷⁷

Throughout the diary, entries detail daily work tasks, trips with the family to and from the station, time with visitors, details about the weather, hours worked, and mileage tracking. Occasionally, it detailed enforcement activities on the forest, as on Sunday, June 30, 1929.

"Drove family in car to Lovell Wyoming. At a point on the road 3/10 of a mile from the Mont-Wyo state line two wagons loaded with timber were encountered. One loaded with dry material, the other with green fir logs and poles. The drivers were stopped and questioned as to the source of the timbers. They said they had cut it in Bear Canyon yesterday, and seemingly did not know this had been done in trespass. They gave their names as Earl C. Wilcox, Rural Route #3, Powell, Wyo., and Earl Allen of the same address. Wilcox seemed to be the foremost of the two, and the man who did the talking and assuming of responsibility, and the elder man. They were informed that a trespass action would be brought against them and they agreed to pay whatever assessment would be made.

The case should be considered an innocent one, since it is believed the trespassers did not cut and remove the material with the idea of theft. The dry material should not be considered as taken in trespass."⁷⁸

In addition to other duties as assigned, the Ranger often had to make decisions in enforcement combined with maintaining community relations. Projects to make public access easier to a growing group of visitors included developing the Ice Cave Point Trail (24CB2404) and access to Crater Ice Cave. Work on the trail continued on Monday, July 1, 1929.

"Ice Cave Pt. Trail – 8 hrs.

Left Sage Cr Sta. via horseback at 6:00 a.m. and rode to Ice Cave Pt. Trail with J.W.B. and surveyed and set stakes on 72 chains of new trail to top of plateau and to Ice Cave. Paced off work done last year. It amounted to 49 chains. Finished by 2 p.m. Then inspected work done by permittees on Sage Cr-Crooked Creek drift fence. Looked it over from end to end. It will pass for this year. Plenty of salt on both Crooked Cr. and also Sage Creek. C& W Ranges, met Logan in Wells Pasture at 3:30 p.m. and examined killed calf. It had been killed by a bear, sure enough. Promised him to take some action then rode to the Hilker sawmill

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Diary of R. A. Coster, Forest Ranger, Vol. I, April 1 to June 30, 1929.

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site where the site & his sale area were looked over. This should be cleaned up before January 1 of '30. Then to Sage Creek Sta. arriving at 6:30 p.m.”⁷⁹

Through much of the summer of 1929, Ray served with fire dispatches in western Montana at a variety of sites after initially reporting to the District Office in Missoula, Montana. He would be away from Sage Creek and his family from July 27 to September 3, 1929. The day after his return, he was back on the job.

“At headquarters Sta. all a.m. straitening up and picking up loose ends. After dinner I drove to Ray ranch in car and advised Mr. Ray that the Forest service could handle the wages of one man working on the Lagar cut-off of the Sage Creek road to the extent of 75.00 for labor and would furnish dynamite to the extent of 3-50# cases (40% stuff). The work is to be done by the county and a man by the name of Owens would have charge of the work. Mr. Ray will not do any work, he said. He thought it would be ok to disburse Mr. Owens wages up to \$75.00. The rate per day is not known. Mr. Ray desires a timber sale for 48 logs he has already cut. Returned to station at 3:30 p.m. Remainder of day in office. Hard frost last night and cold all day.”⁸⁰

Information regarding improvements to the station and the Main Cabin are also provided in the diaries. The excerpts below, from September 1929, further highlight the flexibility required in the position and that visitors made their way to Sage Creek Ranger Station despite the rural location.

Sept. 6, Friday

“Moved kitchen equipment and stove and worked on putting in bathroom partition at Sage Cr. Station.”

Sept 7, Saturday

“Put in and finished bathroom partition and cut window in south wall of kitchen for bathroom window. County Surveyor Frank Bounan and Commissioner Lee Gard were here twice today to talk over the status of the Laggar Cut Off Road, which they now plan to condemn the right of way for.”⁸¹

R. A. Coster's diaries end on July 31, 1931. He and his family left the station at Sage Creek soon after.

After Coster's departure from Sage Creek, the National Forest's underwent further reorganization. On February 17, 1932, President Herbert Hoover issued Executive Order (EO) 5800, consolidating the majority of the lands within the Gallatin and Beartooth National Forests in Montana with those of Absaroka National Forest. The same day, he issued EO 5801, which transferred lands from the Montana and South Dakota portions of the Absaroka and Beartooth National Forests—including the Pryors, eastern Beartooth Plateau, and the West Fork of Rock

⁷⁹ Diary of R. A. Coster, Forest Ranger, Vol. 2, July 1 to September 30, 1929.

⁸⁰ Diary of R. A. Coster, Forest Ranger, Vol. 2, July 1 to September 30, 1929.

⁸¹ Ibid.

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Creek drainage—to the Custer National Forest, significantly increasing the Custer National Forest's size.⁸²

As part of the 1932 consolidation, management of the majority of the Beartooth National Forest lands within the Custer National Forest fell under the previously-established management area called the Beartooth Division.⁸³ The Beartooth Division remained divided into three districts: Pryor Mountain, the Stillwater, and Rock Creek districts. In 1933, nine ranger stations operated in the Beartooth Division of the Custer National Forest: one for Pryor Mountain District, three within Stillwater District, and five within the Rock Creek District.⁸⁴ The Rock Creek Ranger Station grew to incorporate the Pryor Mountain District in 1943.⁸⁵

After Coster's departure, records reveal that Thomas A. (Tom) Clapp was assigned to the Pryor Mountain District in July of 1933. He served as the Custer National Forest Ranger at the Sage Creek Ranger Station in the Pryor District in June of 1937 during a period of heavy rains that resulted in a rise in the general water table.⁸⁶ Retiring on January 31, 1943, Ranger Clapp had served a total of 31 years including time on the Bitterroot and Deer Lodge Forests. For the last 12 years of his employment, he served as a Senior Forest Ranger, three years on the Custer National Forest at Ekalaka and the last nine at Sage Creek, spanning from 1933 to 1942. An article at the time of his retirement described his living quarters:

"The ranger station is an old log and frame structure that never has been modernized. Under Tom's regime he slept in the room used as an office. Beside the bed, main articles of furniture were a table against the wall on which papers were piled, a big rocking chair and a spittoon half full of burned matches. The ranger seldom was seen without a pipe in his mouth, sometime lighted and sometime not burning. He always smoked a pipe until it became too rank for even him to tolerate."⁸⁷

⁸² Robert D. Baker, Larry Burt, Robert S. Maxwell, Victor H. Treat, and Henry C. Dethloff, *The National Forests of the Northern Region Living Legacy* (College Station: Intaglio, Inc., 1993), found at <http://foresthistory.org/ASPNET/Publications/region/1/history/contents.htm>, accessed April 7, 2016; Greta Rayle, Helena Ruter, Mike Bergstrom, Halcyon LaPoint, and John Boughton, *Rock Creek Ranger Station Historic District* National Register nomination, listed October 17, 2016, NR #16000729; Wilson F. Clark, *Custer National Forest Lands: A Brief History*. Billings: Custer National Forest, 1982.

⁸³ William L. Evans, Forest Supervisor, Memorandum to Regional Forester, "a short descriptive article on National Forest Lands and activities in Carbon County to be included in the Water Resources Survey Report for Carbon County" (October 1965), on file at the Custer Gallatin National Forest Office, Billings, MT.

⁸⁴ Custer National Forest Beartooth Division Montana Principal Meridian, Montana map 1933, on file at the Custer Gallatin National Forest Billings Office, Billings.

⁸⁵ *History of the Beartooth Ranger District*, <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/custergallatin/recreation/?cid=stelprd3832460>, accessed May 21, 2015; Greta Rayle, Helena Ruter, Mike Bergstrom, Halcyon LaPoint, and John Boughton, *Rock Creek Ranger Station Historic District* National Register nomination, listed October 17, 2016, NR #16000729.

⁸⁶ *Tales of the Town*, Billings Gazette, June 17, 1937, p. 5.

⁸⁷ *Tom Clapp, Forest Ranger With Yen for His Own Cooking, Retires After Serving for 31 Years*, Billings Gazette, December 20, 1942, p. 13.

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Thomas Clapp was the last Ranger to spend an extended period of full-time living at the Sage Creek Ranger Station during the period of significance. With the Rock Creek Ranger Station incorporating the Pryor Mountain District duties in 1943, the need for a permanent presence at Sage Creek evaporated, resulting in only occasional use.⁸⁸

While the function of the log structure changed over time, continual maintenance and structural stability efforts have preserved this original jewel of the Pryor Mountain landscape, as historic as the associated wild horses and as remote as the caves and valleys hidden in the scenery.

Sage Creek Ranger Station, 1943-1970

While often, but not continually staffed, the Sage Creek Station continued to serve the Forest Service through the years by hosting a variety of diverse activities.

In July of 1947, Mr. Charles R. Ames, a Ranger stationed at the Sage Creek Station, married Miss Lela Rice of Denver. Mr. Ames, was a veteran of the European Theater serving as a member of the Eighty-Second Air-Borne Division. Following their honeymoon, the two made their home at the Sage Creek Station.⁸⁹

During June of 1951 an annual training camp was held at the station for “Custer National Forest rangers, staffmen from the Billings office and spokesmen from regional headquarters at Missoula.”⁹⁰ The week-long training included information about “Grazing applications, special use pastures, property analysis, aerial photo work, horsemanship, horse-shoeing, fire suppression, rural firefighting coordination, law enforcement, field schedules, and work plans.”

In the fall of 1952, fire conditions were so intense that “All forests in Region 1 – which includes Montana, Northern Idaho, Northeastern Washington and Northwest South Dakota – have been closed to hunters who do not possess entry and campfire permits and an axe, shovel and bucket.”⁹¹ In the area, it was announced that the Sage Creek Station would serve as one of the locations to obtain a permit. During years that included the summer of 1952 to 1958,⁹² the Sage Creek Station was staffed by Mr. and Mrs. Hall Smith and family, who would return to Red Lodge in the fall.⁹³

⁸⁸ *History of the Beartooth Ranger District*, <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/custergallatin/recreation/?cid=stelprd3832460>, accessed May 21, 2015; Greta Rayle, Helena Ruter, Mike Bergstrom, Halcyon LaPoint, and John Boughton, *Rock Creek Ranger Station Historic District* National Register nomination, listed October 17, 2016, NR #16000729.

⁸⁹ Billings Gazette, *Wedding Rites Performed In Local Church*, July 6, 1947.

⁹⁰ Billings Gazette, *Forest Rangers to Attend Camp*, Sunday, June 10, 1951.

⁹¹ Billings Gazette, *Forest Permit Stations Named*, Saturday, October 11, 1952.

⁹² Billings Gazette, *Red Lodge Methodist Church Is Scene of Nuptial Rites; Couple Feted at Reception*, Sunday, August 17, 1958.

⁹³ Billings Gazette, *Red Lodge WSCS Appoints Committees for Program; McCabe Family Has Reunion*, Sunday, September 9, 1956.

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Newspaper accounts often detailed the coming and going of many guests. The station often played host to a variety of people. During the summer of 1953, Mr. Hal Smith, assistant ranger at the Sage Creek Ranger Station, and his wife would welcome their guests “Mrs. Hazel Berry, Mr. and Mrs. W. E. Martin and grandsons, Bernard and Bobbie Lee, Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Martin and Janet, and Bill” for the 4th of July.⁹⁴ In addition to acting as host to regular visitors, the Station also served as a base for occasional rescue operations in the Pryors, as happened in late October of 1953 when Bertrand D. Cosgrove and his wife and two children became stranded during a snowstorm that buried the road in six-foot drifts. Smith coordinated efforts as bulldozers were brought in to free the family. During their wait to go home, the family enjoyed the hospitality of the Hal Snyder sheep ranch base camp.⁹⁵

In 1956 a “uranium rush” became a new management issue for the Forest Service. The mining explosion took place on the south side of the Pryor Unit and extended from the upper eastern ridge of Red Pryor Mountain, south across BLM land into Wyoming. Bulldozer and prospectors dotted the landscape with claims as the Sage Creek Ranger Station remained the closest Forest Service building available for management and oversight. Four mines became established by 1956. Discovery of the mineral was somewhat of a surprise to the Forest Service, who stated that “the area is reported to be nonmineral.”⁹⁶ This time, the primary oversight of the land involved was overseen by the forest staff of the Custer National Forest Rock Creek District, headquartered in Red Lodge. In addition to the new mining duties, wild horses constantly entered Forest Service grazing allotments, in some cases due to the removal of fences and gates left open by the swarm of people staking claims.

From 1966 to 1968 the Station served as a base of operations for construction of a road on the north side of Pryor Mountain. The construction of the new road occurred above and higher up the slope than the existing road that crossed private land. The seven-mile-long road, known as Pryor Mountain Road, was built from the Sage Creek Ranger Station to the Sage Creek/Crooked Creek divide. The road improvements provided “a gradual grade road above private land which will open more Custer National Forest land to more people. Some felt that the improvement would “open up hunting on the top of the mountain.”⁹⁷ Regional support for the road proved so great that the Billings Chamber of Commerce Board of Trustees supported it’s construction at their July of 1966 meeting.⁹⁸ According to an article about the potential location of the finished road, some local landowners wanted it on the north side of Sage Creek since the Station was only staffed on weekdays “and is locked on weekends when people visit the area” local landowner Bert Schwend attested.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Billings Gazette, *Reunion on 4th Is Held Near Reed Point*, Sunday, July 12, 1953.

⁹⁵ Billings Gazette, *Bulldozers Near Stranded Family*, Tuesday, October 27, 1953.

⁹⁶ Billings Gazette, *Pryor Mountain Uranium Rush Creates Problems of Roads*, Forest Areas, Sunday, February 5, 1956.

⁹⁷ Billings Gazette, *Bridger Residents Contest Forest Service Decisions*, Saturday, April 16, 1966.

⁹⁸ Billings Gazette, *Chamber Backs Sage Creek Road*, Monday, July 18, 1966.

⁹⁹ Billings Gazette, *Bridger Residents Contest Forest Service Decisions*, Saturday, April 16, 1966.

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The new road also provided better access to timber for harvest and in the fall of 1968, two million board feet located in the divide between Sage and Crooked creeks was scheduled for sale.¹⁰⁰ During that time, the station also supported the monitoring of 13 grazing allotments with 1,700 head of cattle, and one allotment with 1,200 sheep. By 1970, access to recreational opportunities in the Pryor Mountains was being touted through the media.

Physical Improvements to the Sage Creek Ranger Station, 1908 to 1943

As the use of the location evolved from when the property was withdrawn for use as an administrative facility in 1908, to becoming a seasonal administrative facility from 1943-1944, and into the late 1990s, a grouping of lesser sheds, outbuildings, and features came and went according to the importance and role of the station.

By 1930, Sage Creek Ranger Station boasted a “well 26’ deep located 12’ south of the house” and “...was equipped with bath, lavatory, closet combination, sink, hot-water tank, pressure tank, pump, septic tank, sewer line and filter bed. The water supply comes from the well and is pumped by hand. This type of equipment is giving satisfactory service.”¹⁰¹

Other improvements to the property by this time reflected the rural-nature and remote setting, despite that it was the 1930s. These improvements included an 18’ x 24’ barn, “log type, roofed with rubberoid,” with two one-horse stalls, a single two-horse stall, a box stall, saddle and granary room, hay loft, lean-to garage built of poles and lumber, and a lean-to wagon shed built of lumber.

Additional construction by that time included a framed 4’ x 5’ latrine with a shingled roof that had “adequate pit and proper sanitary fixtures;” and a frame-built 16’ x 20’ 1½ story warehouse with a gravel floor and roof and walls covered in rubberoid, constructed in fiscal year 1924 as “emergency construction.”¹⁰²

Other buildings erected by 1930 represented the self-sustaining nature of the Sage Creek Ranger Station. A 6’ x 8’ cellar with “concrete floor, walls and ceiling allowed for the preservation of perishable items and a 14’ x 18’ log poultry house with rubberoid roof, constructed in fiscal year 1926, yielded a fresh supply of meat, other than beef.”¹⁰³

Growing in local importance during this time, more improvements to the property were proposed and presumably carried out. Main Cabin improvements suggested included the addition of interior sheetrock, sealing the back porch, adding an entrance from the front porch to the office, modifying interior and exterior doors, constructing kitchen “built-in-cupboards,” and varnishing and painting the entire interior of the building. Proposed buildings construction included a log

¹⁰⁰ Billings Gazette, *New Access Road Key to Pryors*, Sunday, December 1, 1968,

¹⁰¹ Forest Service file *SageCreekRS-1931-Narrative-Cropped.tif*, *Memorandum to Accompany Administrative Building Plan Map (Revised March 1931)*, provided by the Forest Service.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

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14' x 16' warehouse, the replacement of the emergency warehouse with a 12' x 20' coal and wood shed, and building a 14' x 16' log bunk-house.¹⁰⁴

“When this program is completed, except for annual maintenance, no further development of the headquarters site will be needed for several years. There is now a small lawn and willow trees, evergreens, and shrubs, have been introduced and are well started at this time. A dry, rubble-rock wall is planned for that bank of the small stream which flows through the yard and also a cement walk paralleling the stream. No separate office is planned on account of the unusual amount of space available in the dwelling.”¹⁰⁵

Sage Creek Ranger Station Since 1990

In 1990, a draft National Register nomination for the Sage Creek Ranger Station was completed for the Forest Service, but never submitted.¹⁰⁶ The document provides an inventory of the buildings and structures on the property at the time. Still present in 1990 were the Main Cabin, rectangular wood frame storage shed (sitting on wood piers) northwest of the cabin, a fire cache, an engineer's shack, and three outhouses south of the cabin. Site structures remaining in 1990 included the post-and-pole fence that surrounded the building, a well/cistern consisting of a steel metal culvert sunk vertically into the ground south of the house, an aluminum culvert pipe set vertically as part of the old sanitary system, and the post-and-pole corral located to the north.

Some sill log replacements occurred in 1992 and the cabin was placed on concrete blocks. New daubing was applied to the structure. In 1993, a new cedar shingle roof was installed and doors and window trim repainted. Necessary repairs were also made to windows and frames and new glazing applied.¹⁰⁷

These features were still present in 2005 when the USDA Forest Service, Region 1, submitted a proposal to raise the cabin 16" - 18" with jacks, place a concrete foundation beneath the structure, and replace the concrete floor and wall of the northeast porch.¹⁰⁸ In addition to stabilizing the structure, a concrete foundation would mitigate the continual problem of marmots and pack rats burrowing beneath the house and porch. Administratively, the project was led by Halcyon LaPoint, Forest Archaeologist and Mike Bergstrom, Zone Archaeologist.

“Implementation of this proposed project will be conducted by the Region 1 Historic Preservation Team (RHPT), CNF Engineering and Heritage staff, MSU-Billings College

¹⁰⁴ Forest Service file *SageCreekRS-1931-Narrative-Cropped.tif*, *Memorandum to Accompany Administrative Building Plan Map (Revised March 1931)*, provided by the Forest Service.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ J. Bolton and A. Hubber, *Draft National Register of Historic Places Registration form, Sage Creek Work Center*, Historical Research Associates, Inc, June 1990.

¹⁰⁷ File *SageCreekCabin.pptx*, *Sage Creek Cabin*, supplied by the Custer-Gallatin National Forest.

¹⁰⁸ File *SageCreekCabinHSE-2005.doc*, *Heritage Stewardship Enhancement*, Project Submission Form, USDA Forest Service, Region 1, 2005. P. 2.

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of Technology volunteers, the district fire crew and a local contractor. Implementation is scheduled for early Spring 2005, or as soon as weather conditions will allow.”¹⁰⁹

In the fall of 2005, Instructor Tim Urbaniak led students in the Drafting and Design Program of the Montana State University Billings, College of Technology (currently City College), visited the property “for the purposes of photographing, measuring, and surveying.”¹¹⁰ The project generated data used for planning, including a dimensioned floor plan. At the time of the survey, five small sheds, one to the northwest, and four to the south of the Main Cabin, were present. All were removed soon after, as was the perimeter post and pole fence and a 50’ tall vertical wood pole and antennae located at the southwest corner of the cabin.

In June of 2006, the project commenced by lifting the cabin using threaded jacks and a support system of wood “needles and cribbing.”¹¹¹ A cadre of Forest Service employees and volunteers were led by renowned architectural conservators Kirby Matthew, Team Leader of the U.S. Forest Service’s Region 1 Historic Preservation Team and his assistant Cathy Bickenheuser. Over the course of two weeks, the cabin slowly inched skyward as the screw jacks were slowly turned as an orchestrated effort by the group. In November of 2006, small excavating equipment arrived to clear the earth below the cabin to construct the footing and foundation system.

The cabin remained in an elevated and stabilized condition until the summer of 2007. In June, the concrete footing and foundation was placed beneath the structure. During this period the antennae pole at the southwest corner of the building was removed. In September, Kirby Matthew and Cathy Bickenheuser returned and replaced and added sill logs bearing appropriate finish marks. The building was then lowered onto its new foundation. In 2008, as foundation construction moved toward completion, interior walls were repainted, and historically appropriate kitchen cabinets and new door hardware installed. By the end of 2009, the porch supports and accompanying concrete floor and wall were rebuilt to their original dimensions. Through 2011 and 2012, repairs continued to be made to the Main Cabin. By 2015, major restoration work on the cabin was complete. Today, the building appears much as it did in the 1920s and 1930s, with the exception of the ADA ramp access.

For their role in the preservation of the historic Sage Creek Work Station, in January of 2007, Halcyon LaPoint and Mike Bergstrom of the Custer Gallatin National Forest were recognized by their peers as the Northern Region recipients of the National Windows on the Past award.¹¹² Their role in the preservation of the site spans over 10 years and continues today. Future plans include the restoration of the post-and-pole fence that once surrounded the house.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ File *Sage Creek Station Report 03.doc*, *Sage Creek Ranger Station, Structure Stabilization and Update, Fall of 2005*, Garret Stroup and Scott Zinda.

¹¹¹ The term is used to describe the horizontal timbers (pins) and their supporting stacked wood piers (cribbing).

¹¹² *Windows on the Past Award*, Letter from James S. Bedwell, Director of Recreation and Heritage Resources, Washington Office, Washington, DC, January 12, 2007.

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The Main Cabin continues to be used for occasional Forest Service meetings. Forthcoming plans include its use as a rental cabin.

Architectural Trends Adopted by the Forest Service (1897–1942)¹¹³

The following section was derived from *Evaluation of Region 1 Forest Service-Owned Buildings for Eligibility to the National Register of Historic Places: Volume 1*, prepared for the Ashland Ranger District of the Custer Gallatin National Forest (then Custer National Forest) by Janene Caywood, James McDonald, and Theodore Catton of Historical Research Associates, Inc. (HRA) in 1991. This report includes historical contexts that trace the development of the Forest Service and its “permanent improvement program” and identifies major architectural trends for historic buildings located within Region 1. The synopsis provides a valuable and insightful look at Forest Service properties, such as the Sage Creek Ranger Station.

Between 1897 and 1918, Forest Service rangers—the same people responsible for building trails and guarding the forest against fire—designed and built most of the permanent improvements in Region 1. In some instances, the sites selected for administrative withdrawals already contained improvements that had been built and abandoned by failed homesteaders and miners. The Forest Service buildings built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries fit the definition of “vernacular” as defined by James Deetz:

...folk building, done without benefit of formal plans. Such structures are frequently built by their occupants or, if not, by someone who is well within the occupant’s immediate community. Vernacular structures are the person’s inner feelings, their ideas of what is or is not suitable to them.¹¹⁴

Buildings were utilitarian in character, due to the need to provide for varying uses, sometimes within the same building. For example, at most early administrative sites, the living quarters and office space occupied the same building. In the 1905 edition of the *Use Book* it was stated that:

Eventually all the Rangers who serve year round will be furnished with headquarter cabins on the Reserves. It is in the intention of the Forest Service to build these as rapidly as funds will permit. Whenever possible, cabins should be built of logs with shingle or shake roofs. The hardware, glass, and door and window frames may be purchased on authorization from the Forester. Cabins should be sufficient size to afford comfortable living accommodations to the family of the Ranger stationed in them and this Ranger will be held responsible for the proper care of the cabin and the ground surrounding it.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ “Architectural Trends Adopted by the Forest Service (1897-1942)” is taken in its entirety from Greta Rayle, Helena Ruter, Mike Bergstrom, Halcyon LaPoint, and John Boughton, *Rock Creek Ranger Station Historic District* National Register nomination, listed October 17, 2016, NR #16000729.

¹¹⁴ James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life*, (New York: Doubleday, 1977), p. 93.

¹¹⁵ USDA Forest Service, *The Use of the National Forest Reserves: Regulations and Instructions* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1905), p. 108.

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The variation in workmanship, materials, and design exhibited among these early buildings reflects the skills of the individual builder, rather than the agency's standards and designs. Following guidelines such as those published in the 1906 *Use Book*, early Forest Rangers typically built their office/homes with log walls, stone foundations, and wood shingles or possibly shakes hand split at the site for the roof. The Forest Service left design elements such as the number of stories, the floor plan and the roof style, to the rangers who appear to have employed the skills and styles with which they felt most comfortable.

Since Rangers were "unofficially" expected to complete much of this work during off-duty hours, the quality of construction of the earliest buildings varies.¹¹⁶ Apparently, rangers had an unrestricted role in deciding the layout of the buildings at early stations. Consequently, the atmosphere of these early stations is similar to that of contemporary homesteads.

Few administrative sites remain that are representative of the early phase of development, as many were redeveloped following World War I (WWI). Additionally, it appears that the Forest Service destroyed a large number of the remaining stations constructed during this time period in the 1950s and 1960s, when "excess" buildings were sold and destroyed.

After the end of WWI, the Forest Service resumed the task of establishing new improvements, primarily at previously existing administrative properties. The Forest Service was more visible than ever before, and it needed improvements which were usable, easy to maintain and acceptable to the public. Over the next 25 years, the Forest Service adopted increasingly strict procedures regarding the permanent improvements constructed in the Region.

The period between 1918 and 1928 is unremarkable in terms of the numbers of buildings constructed within the Region, partly due to the Forest Service's continuing problem with securing funds for buildings. Although Forest Service employees continued to construct many of the buildings that did receive funding, the choice of building design and building placement was reviewed at a higher level, usually at least by the Forest Supervisor. A wider variety of building materials appear to have been acceptable and architectural designs reflect those common at the local and regional level. In this sense, the Forest Service simply continued with the same principle which had guided its earliest construction or the notion that it is best to blend in with the local culture.

During the 1920s, materials and designs selected for specific sites appear to have depended in part upon the location of the property and availability of materials. Administrative properties located in areas accessible to supply points tend to contain frame buildings rather than log buildings. These wood frame buildings are similar in most respects to the buildings that would have been found in the nearby towns and cities. The most common style of frame building from the 1920s and into the 1930s is the bungalow type building with "Craftsman" detailing. These buildings are commonly rectangular in plan, with a gable roof and exposed rafter ends, roof

¹¹⁶ It is evident from reviewing the administrative site improvement plans from the 1920s and 1930s that many of the early buildings were not well-constructed, and these were the first to be replaced during the rebuilding era which followed World War I.

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braces or brackets, and droplap or shingle exterior siding. Both double-hung and hopper style windows are commonly found with both styles often used on the same building.

It is possible that the Forest Service designed Bungalow style buildings specifically for a particular site (although no architectural plans or drawings were located for these types of buildings) or that they represent "pattern book plans" common during the 1920s. In either case, the materials used in construction and finishing were those available to the general population.

In more remote areas, log construction continued to predominate. Many of these log buildings also possess elements of "Craftsman" detailing, including exposed rafter ends and roof braces and/or brackets, and dormers. Most log buildings constructed during the 1920s have rectangular floor plans with gable roofs, and either an open shed roof porch along the long axis of the building or a continuous gable roof porch.

The notching method selected appears to be a function of the skills of the builder, and placement of the entry to be a function of the size of the building. In small buildings, the door is offset to the side to allow for optimal use of interior wall space. The larger buildings tend to have centrally placed entries. Most of the buildings constructed according to this plan have multi-pane sliding windows; however, a few hopper and awning windows were observed in buildings of this type.

A wood frame version of the one-room dwelling was also used, but it appears to post-date, by 8 to 10 years, the first use of log buildings of this style. Usually buildings of this type are found at smaller administrative properties, which were developed for intermittent use by the Forest Service in remote areas. Also, several occur at fire lookouts for use as quarters for the fire guards, when the lookout building itself was unsuitable for habitation. The majority of these buildings date to the period between 1928 and 1934, although there are earlier and later representatives.

Another significant development which appears to have taken place during the late 1920s was the introduction of the technique of log "scribing" to produce very tightly fitting ventral saddle notches. Most log buildings constructed prior to the late 1920s have either square notches, "V" notches, double saddle notches or variations of the dovetail notch. However, beginning in the late 1930s, virtually all log building construction initiated by the Forest Service involved the use of a scribe, an instrument which when drawn along the interface of two logs, marks the area to be cut for the notch, which requires little daubing or chinking.¹¹⁷

Another advantage of the use of the scribe method is that it requires only minimal skills with an axe to produce a high-quality log building. Documents obtained from some of the forests in the region indicate that by the late 1920s, the skills required to construct adequate log buildings were

¹¹⁷ Daubing and chinking are terms used to refer to the materials applied to the spaces between wall logs to seal the building. For purposes of this context, the chinking applies to materials such as paper, rags, and poles which are usually pushed or stuffed into cavities. Daubing refers to material which must be prepared and applied to the building wet, such as mud/sand and lime/sand mixtures, tar, and cement. Both types of material may be used in one building.

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not universally possessed by the majority of Forest Service employees. Unless a forest happened to be particularly lucky in employing a competent builder, they could have trouble getting their improvements. The following excerpt from *A History of Ranger Stations and Administrative Sites on the Moose Creek Ranger District*, describes the problem:

Leroy Lewis was appointed Bear Creek District ranger in 1927...Lewis seemed to be interested in building construction and in the types of buildings used by the Forest Service. It did not set well that the several log buildings used by the service depicted no "particular regional standard of construction." He used the term "Selway wood butchers" to show his feelings. In 1928 Clyde Blake, "a scribe cabin expert" was detailed to the forest to train all rangers in the timber scribe method of log building constructed (undated and anonymous).¹¹⁸

The year 1928 marks the beginning of a more formal approach to receiving Regional consistency in building design and construction. During that year, Clyde Fickes moved to the branch of operations at the Regional Office in Missoula. Although brought to Missoula to work on finalizing the design for a pre-cut lookout house, Regional administrators soon placed him in charge of all improvement work conducted by the branch of operations. Although the Region had been moving towards standardizing its permanent improvements, it was not until 1928, that this goal began to be realized.

The Main Cabin at the Sage Creek Ranger Station embodies many of the characteristics highlighted by Caywood and others. The earliest portion of the cabin already stood on the property when the withdrawal of the land occurred for administrative use. The cabin, both the 1892 portion, and the subsequent additions, easily fit the description of "vernacular" with the final structure truly utilitarian, housing both the administrative duties and also serving as the living quarters of the ranger (and his family). The Main Cabin followed the 1905 edict outlined in the *Use Book* of building with logs and a shake or shingle roof. Other Forest Service touchstones include the construction of shed roof porches. The Main Cabin displays the skills of the persons responsible for its construction, and while not necessarily the work of a "master", the cabin certainly demonstrates the characteristics of a type of building constructed in rural areas of the west, and those methods of construction of such a type.

The loss of many of the early Forest Service administrative sites following WWI highlights the importance of the Sage Creek Ranger Station Main Cabin. The additions to the 1892 original structure that were either constructed on site, or possibly brought in from elsewhere and then attached to the existing structure, truly reflect the horrendous lack of funding the agency faced at the time. Regardless of the origin of the additions, the Main Cabin followed the earliest Forest Service principle of blending in with the local area and setting, featuring locally available materials.

¹¹⁸ This document is available at the Nez Perce National Forest District 6 Office in Grangeville, Idaho.

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Additional Information

The unedited text of chapters 1 and 2 of David Harvey's, "*A General Historical Survey of the Pryor Mountains*," cited above as the early background history of the Pryor Mountains and Sage Creek area is presented below for the interested reader.

I. Early History and General Description of the Pryors

"The Crow country is a good country. The Great Spirit has put it exactly in the right place... When the summer heats scorch the prairies, you can draw up under the mountains, where the air is sweet and cool, the grass fresh, and the bright streams come tumbling out of the snow banks... In the autumn, when your horses are fat and strong from the mountain pastures, you can go into the plains and hunt the buffalo."¹¹⁹

Arapooish, Crow Chief

The Pryor Mountains are located in southeastern Montana with a small portion of its foothills in Wyoming. They are west of the Big Horns, and east of the Clarks Fork Valley. The history of the Pryors does not stretch back very far, in written record terminology anyhow. In fact, the history of all of Montana is not very old. The historic period in Montana only begins with the Lewis and Clark expedition (1805-1806). This is not to say that other trappers and explorers had not previously penetrated the territory of what is known today as Montana. But it was not until Lewis and Clark that a definitive historical account was recorded about the Upper Missouri country and the mountains to the south. Of the mountains to the south, I am most concerned about the Pryors.

"Among traders who penetrated the country west of the Missouri River prior to the 19th century were the French Canadian Verendyre brothers."¹²⁰ They were obsessively concerned with locating a waterway through the interior of the country to the Pacific Ocean, during the years of 1742-1743. Their exact route through the Yellowstone Valley, and the Big Horn Basin, has been opened to much speculation. One source has them leaving the Missouri River country and "turning south to the Yellowstone they passed through Pryor Gap to the Shoshone River and followed up the Big Horn as far as the Wind River Mountains."¹²¹ Any how, it was not until Lewis and Clark that a definitive guide for fur traders was possible.

The Pryors, and Pryor Creek, obtained their "civilized" names after Sergeant Nathaniel Pryor of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Pryor is most known for his misfortune while camping on Pryor Creek, north of the mountains. Crow Indians stole all of his horses during the night! Pryor was to have delivered the horses to Clark at a destination along the Yellowstone. They were to have been used for trade with the Mandan Indians. Sergeant Pryor and his company had to proceed by foot towards the Yellowstone and then down the river in makeshift "skin" canoes, catching up with Clark somewhere on the Missouri.

The mountains that Pryor saw, and were to be named after, are "low and ancient mountains. They contain beautiful miniature canyons, limestone caves, outcroppings of the oldest rock in the world

¹¹⁹ Washington Irving, *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville*, (Portland, Oregon: Binfords and Mort).

¹²⁰ Thomas Keyhole, *Montana Prehistory*, (Pamphlet, Billings Public Library Clippings File).

¹²¹ David J. Wasden, *From Beaver to Oil*, (Cheyenne, Wyoming: Pioneer Printing and Stationery Company, 1973), p. 8.

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– and a long, long record of human occupation.”¹²² The visual contrasts of “white limestone palisades with dark conifers, of open grassy spaces with surrounding forests, of flat places with sudden steep overlooks, give the Pryors a special feeling.”¹²³ I have often felt this feeling. The Pryors have a “soft” personality all their own. There is a stillness and serenity about them. They are not violent or restless. They are like a person who has come to terms with him or herself. They have found peace within.

The Crows looked upon the Pryors as a spiritual place. It was a place to be revered and respected. Crow Indian Henry Old Coyote spoke of the earth (the Pryors) as our “mother”: “We come from it and we return to it. The earth is our commissary for food, fuel, shelter and tools.”¹²⁴

The Pryors are divided into five environmental zones. The alpine zone, from 8,000 to 8,800 feet, is mostly large open meadows with lower elevations sporting timber around the fringes of the meadows. Summer grazing of cattle and sheep takes place here. The limestone rockland zone, from 6,000 to 8,000 feet, is made up of steep-sided canyons dotted with thousands of caves. Its ridges are covered with fir, spruce and pine. The lower slopes of these mountainsides make up the sandstone cuesta (5,400-6,000 feet) zone. The grassland zone, from 4,600-5,400 feet, is made up mostly of open rolling prairie with some flat top hills, with a lot of sagebrush. The lowest zone, the dryland (3,500-4,600 feet), is about five to six miles from the slopes of the mountains, with large expanses of open country, devoid of much vegetation.¹²⁵

The Pryors are a small oasis in a vast dryland. The area has been too dry to support agriculture and a large population. Yet, the Pryors are and have been more liveable (sp) than ranges like the Beartooth. Their gentle slopes remind one of the “soft” mountain ranges back East, like the Appalachians. Although devoid of the abundant vegetation of eastern ranges, the Pryors “rich environmental diversity has made for excellent living habitation for man for centuries.”¹²⁶

Lawrence L. Loendorf made an archaeological study of the Pryors in 1969, which indicated that many of the mountains’ caves showed little indication of Indian habitation. “Lack of water was one main reason why many of the caves were not occupied by prehistoric peoples.”¹²⁷ Joe Medicine Crow, Crow Indian archaeologist, claims his people never occupied the caves. When the Crows came to the area about 300 years ago, members of the lost “Sheepeater Tribe” were occupying some of the caves.¹²⁸

Other evidence of Indian habitation of the Pryors is the existence of many “Tipi Rings” in the area. Tipi rings are stone circles that were supposedly used to hold down the skin of a conical

¹²² Ibid., p. 9.

¹²³ Helen M. Peterson, “Pryor Mountain Area – Land of Legend, History and Mystery,” Billings Gazette, April 10, 1966, p. 9.

¹²⁴ University of Missouri Interpretive Study Team, “Interpretive Plan for the Custer National Forest Lands in the Pryor Mountains of South-Central Montana,” Billings: Custer National Forest Headquarters, Historical Files, March 1972, p. 6.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Lawrence L. Loendorf, *The Results of the Archaeological Survey in the Pryor Mountains – Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area, 1969 Field Session*, University of Missouri, 1971, pp. 124-128.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 70.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

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shaped habitational structure. But some rings are too small or too large for that use. "Also, many rings lack other evidence of human habitation, such as artifacts, use of fire, floors, and great distances from wood and water. Therefore, some of the rings must have been used for ceremonial purposes."¹²⁹

The Crows are of Siouan origin. They were once part of the Hidatsu tribe that was driven from the Great Lakes region by the Sioux and Chippewa tribes. About 1600, the Hidatsu located along the Missouri River, near where Mandan, North Dakota, is today. They split into two bands. One went westward towards the Yellowstone and became known as the Crows. Originally, in Hidatsu tongue, the Crows were called "Absarokee." "Absa" meant large-beaked bird, and "Rokee" meant children. Sign language interpretation of "Absarokee" was represented by the flapping of the arms, like wings, like a raven or a "crow."¹³⁰

The Pryors were considered more blessed than other mountain ranges. It was a place to fast and hopefully receive "visions." But the Pryors were more than just a sacred area. "The constant pressure of surrounding hostile Indian tribes made the Pryors an important refuge or retreat, as compared to the openness of the surrounding buffalo plains."¹³¹ Once the Crows were outnumbered 20 to 1 along Pryor Creek, but they drove off their enemies. They used Pryor Gap as a "trap" against their adversaries. Many a fight occurred there, with the last one occurring around 1870.

The Crow names for rivers, mountain ranges, creeks, and other geographical locations were drawn from the same sources as their personal names: supernatural experiences, actual events, and physical features. Present-day Pryor Gap was originally called "Hits-with-the-Arrows" Gap, names after the Indian practice of shooting arrows at "Arrow Rock." It was a sacrifice to the god-like "Little People" who supposedly lived in the rock. Hence, Pryor Creek is really Arrow Creek, and the Pryor Mountains are Arrowhead Mountains.¹³²

There are two versions of how these supernatural "Little People" came about. The first is that they emerged from "Arrow Rock" to give advice to a fasting chief, who later became a highly respected medicine man. The second version has to do with a Crow Indian couple traveling through the Gap one day with their infant son. The baby was fastened to a dog travois, but he fell off and could not be found. Years later, when evil times had befallen the Crow tribe, a young man emerged from "Arrow Rock" and told the Crows where to find food. This young man was supposedly the "lost baby," who during those years had been cared for by the "Little People." Thereafter, offerings consisting of arrows and rock piling have been left for the "Little People" at Arrow Rock.¹³³ These sacrifices would insure safe passage through the Gap. Arrow Rock is located at the north end of Pryor Gap.

Nearby Arrow Rock is a cave named the "Home of the Little People." It is located a couple of miles south of Arrow Rock on the east side of Pryor Creek Canyon. "The cave is supposed to

¹²⁹ Peterson, "Pryor Mountain Area – Land of Legend, History and Mystery," p. 9.

¹³⁰ Loendorf, *The Results of the Archaeological Survey*.

¹³¹ Ralph M. Shane, *Historical Map of the Crow Indian Reservation*.

¹³² Peter Nabakov, *Two-Leggings*, New York: Crowell, 1967, p. 101.

¹³³ University of Missouri Interpretive Study Team, "Interpretive Plan for the Custer National Forest," p. 22.

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have supernatural powers for one who is able to withstand the little people's abuse before they give you the power."¹³⁴

The "Little People" supposedly left when the railroad scared them away when they built the tunnel through the mountain near Arrow Rock. But some insist they have returned, and are alive and well in Pryor Gap.

These "mysteries of the environment have always been attractive rather than repellent to the Indians."¹³⁵ Another Indian name for the Pryors, "the Land of the Eagle," probably originated because of the "Thunderbird" mystery. The nest of the "Thunderbird" is reportedly located above Sage Creek in the Pryors. Joe Medicine Crow claims that whenever Crows got near a certain heavily timbered hill thunder and lightning would occur. This seemed to indicate that "Thunderbird" nested there. One time a white man went there to cut timber and was struck and killed by lightning! This really convinced most Crows that "Thunderbird" lived there. Joe Medicine Crow says he would go up there, "but only in December when Thunderbird sleeps!"¹³⁶

During the period of fur trading and trapping, from the early to mid-1800's, good relations generally prevailed between the Crows and the trappers. One of the first trappers to explore the Big Horn Basin, via the Pryor Mountains, was John Colter. A member of the Lewis and Clark expedition, Colter gained release from the expedition on its return trip through Montana in 1807. Passing through Pryor Gap during the winter of 1807-1808, Colter explored the Big Horn Basin and eventually went on to discover the wonders of what is known today as Yellowstone National Park. Colter's main objective was to drum up fur trade for Manuel Lisa.

After Colter's exploration, the Pryor Gap provided a gateway for trappers on their way to the Big Horn Basin. Clashes inevitably occurred between the different fur companies. The independent or "free" trappers competed against the big fur company of the time, the American Fur Company. A group of these independents entered the Big Horn Basin from the south in the fall of 1848. "They spent the fall months trapping the various streams between Wind River and Pryor Creek. They spent the winter in a small basin in the Pryor Mountains, which allotted them security and defense from the Indians."¹³⁷ They lived off the plentiful number of elk, deer, and buffalo in the Pryors. Trouble with the Blackfeet Indians occurred when seven of them were caught stealing the trappers' horses. Two were shot and scalped, while the rest escaped. The trappers did not want the Indians to get away for fear that their camp would be exposed. The Indians circled around the southwest Pryors and headed towards the Gap, but were caught on the way by the trappers. "That night the camp in the Pryors had seven scalps as trophies of the day's adventure."¹³⁸

The Indian and trapper explorations through the Gap gave way in later years to freight haulers. They hauled supplies between Billings and the Big Horn Basin via the Pryor gap. The railroad at the turn of the (last) century replace the freight haulers as the principal means of moving cargo and supplies from the Yellowstone Valley to the Big Horn basin.

¹³⁴ Roger Stops, "Interviewed by Stuart Conner at Crow Agency, Montana," November 15, 1967, p. 13.

¹³⁵ Thomas Leforge (as told to Thomas Marquis), *Memoirs of a White Crow Indian*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1974), p. 188.

¹³⁶ Stops, *Interviewed by Stuart Conner*, p. 3.

¹³⁷ Wasden, *From Beaver to Oil*, p. 29.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

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Another route that connected the Yellowstone Valley and the Big Horn Basin was the “Bad Pass.” It is located between the Pryors and the Big Horns, running along the west side of the Big Horn River. It was also known as the Sioux or Shoshone Trail. “This well-used route is now generally called “Bad Pass,” rather than Sioux Trail, because it describes the trail’s geography and its name does not imply use by only one group.”¹³⁹ “Bad Pass” is an appropriate name for the trail because it runs through such a contorted and twisted terrain. Captain Bonneville described the pass as a “frightful and rugged route emphatically called the bad pass.”¹⁴⁰

“Bad Pass” is marked in several places (especially the stretch between the Devil’s Canyon and Barry’s Landing) by rock piling or cairns along the trail. The cairns are subjects of varied interpretations. “Tuffy” Abbott of Bridger recalled that Plenty Coups, a good friend of his, told him that the rock pilings were placed along the road to mark the trail for other tribes coming along the canyon. Francis Burrell of Lovell claims that the rock pilings along the “Bad Pass” Trail are there because they were in the way! Indians picked up the rocks and threw them to the side. Otherwise, the roadbed would have been too rocky for their travois (sic).

Explorers and trappers alike used the “Bad Pass” Trail. Larocque in 1805 travelled with the Crow and some Shoshone to the base of the Big Horns via the trail. The Crows also used the trail to get to the Mandan-Hidatsu villages. In 1810, William Price Hunt took the Astor party along this route to the Crows. With the establishment of fur posts at the mouth of the Big Horn, the “Bad Pass” was used by fur traders coming from their annual rendezvous in the Rockies.¹⁴¹

One surveying crew in the Bighorn Canyon was led by one of the first white men to walk through the canyon, Edward Gillette. He was a locating engineer for the Burlington Railroad. In March, 1891, Gillette and company headed down the snow and ice-filled canyon. They returned via the Sioux (Bad Pass) Trail: “The country was covered a foot or more with snow, the trail could be seen like a great white ribbon a mile distant winding its way through the hills. This old trail runs parallel to the canyon and some four or five miles to the west...skirting the base of the Pryor Mountains. From the size of the trail and the thousands of piles of rock which mark its course, this thoroughfare, connecting the Big Horn Basin with the Yellowstone Valley, must have been used for centuries by buffalo and Indians.”¹⁴²

“Bad Pass” was “a prehistoric and historic Indian trail, a trade route for mountain men, a cattle trail, a mail route to the Dryhead, and now an access to a recreation area.”¹⁴³ Two other significant trails that passed near the Pryor Mountain country were the Bozeman and Bridger Trails. Both were concerned in reaching the gold strikes in the mountains around Virginia City, in western Montana. Both trails opened up routes for trade and settlement in Montana. The first great wave of homesteaders into Montana came along these routes, with the Bozeman Trail being the most significant. Opened in the early 1860’s by John Bozeman, one of the routes taken by the caravans along the Bozeman came through the Pryors “along the Beauvois Creek in the Dryhead country, but did not cross the creek at initial contact, but followed an old Indian trail called the

¹³⁹ Loendorf, *The Results of the Archaeological Survey*, p. 112.

¹⁴⁰ Irving, *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville*, p. 163.

¹⁴¹ Loendorf, *The Results of the Archaeological Survey*, p. 116.

¹⁴² Edward Gillette, *Locating the Iron Trail*, Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1925, p. 87.

¹⁴³ Loendorf, *The Results of the Archaeological Survey*, p. 111.

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‘Tepee Trail’ along the northern foothills of the Pryor Mountains to the Clarks Fork River.”¹⁴⁴

The Bozeman Trail crossed near the present town of Pryor, Just north of the Pryor Gap. Pete Tuggle, owner of a ranch southeast of Pryor, showed me many wagon ruts on his land made by the caravans along the Bozeman. Pete said, “There was not any set trail. They crossed wherever the land was solid!”

The Bozeman Trail was abandoned by the United States government around 1868 because of military defeats inflicted upon the U. S. Army in their attempt to keep the road open against Red Cloud and his Sioux warriors. It was the U. S. Cavalry’s “Vietnam.”

Trapper and explorer Jim Bridger advocated a shorter, easier and safer route towards the western Montana gold fields. To avoid the Sioux nation, he reportedly went through the Big Horn Basin, and then northwest up through present-day Frannie and Warren; and then took the route between Bowler and Bridger, passing one mile south of the present town of Bridger. But this route has been challenged. Dick Colberg of Billings claims that possibly “the Bridger Trail, when west of Red Pryor Mountain, cut northeast through Pryor Gap and joined the Bozeman Trail and then proceeded west to present-day Edgar.”¹⁴⁵ The 1868 surveyor general’s map seems to confirm the possibility of an alternate Bridger Trail through the Gap.

The migratory rush towards the gold field in western Montana had its effect on the Pryors and eastern Montana. Wagon trains and travelers to western Montana needed protection, hence, the presence of the U. S. Army in eastern Montana. Protection (increased after Custer’s defeat in 1876) from the Indians offered an inducement to some westward-bound settlers to go no further and to put down roots in the eastern part of the territory. Hence, the large Crow Reservation was pressured to release some of its land for white settlement. “Between 1891-1904, the Crows signed three important agreements with the United States. Two of these agreements reduced acreage of the reservation in return for which the Indians received money to underwrite needed capital improvements. The third agreement allowed the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad to build tracks across the Reservation.”¹⁴⁶

One of these agreements, ratified in Congress on March 3, 1891, opened up most of the Pryor Mountains to homesteaders. Misunderstandings developed concerning the residual rights of individual Indians in the area ceded to the United States. Many white “claim jumpers” trespassed on land held by these Indians. On October 15, 1892, President Benjamin Harrison issued a proclamation declaring land ceded by the March 3, 1891, agreement, and not reserved to the Indians, was open to settlement. But since the area had not been surveyed, these “claim jumpers” swarmed in and took up Indian as well as government land. This naturally led to hot tempers and nervous guns, ending up with one Crow being shot to death! Harmony eventually came about when the area was partly surveyed and Indian allotments identified.¹⁴⁷

With the opening of the “ceded strip,” homesteads mushroomed in the Pryors, especially along Sage Creek, in the Bowler Flats, on Crooked Creek and in the Dryhead.

¹⁴⁴ Lorenz J. McIntyre, *The Bridger and Bozeman Trails*, Midland Review, October 5, 1939, p. 10.

¹⁴⁵ Stuart W. Conner, *Unpublished Manuscript on the Bridger Trail*, Billings Public Library, Clippings File, August 19, 1969, p. 1.

¹⁴⁶ Edwin Bearss, *Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area, Vol. II*, U. S. Department of the Interior and the National Park Service, 1970, p. 359.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 360.

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II. The Wild Horses

Today as the sun rays linger, and the bitter winters past:
There comes a man with papers, that claims my range and grass.
Although I have left the valleys, and left the lowlands green
And wandered to the badlands the worst I've ever seen,
Seems they're not content to leave me, In these bleak and dreary hills
I must go elsewhere they tell me, and not marr these wasted spills.
Yes must leave the range forever, give up the battle at last
They say the sheep and doagies are entitled to my grass.
I have fought my way thro winter weather, fair yes warm and even cold.
Never have I ask a helping, from those sturdy men so bold
Now that lies behind me and my summers just ahead.
Yes I've fought my way thro winters, froze and shivered in the cold.
I've given up the valleys in the quest of man's desire
Now they claim the badlands and the sloping hills that's higher.

Claim the hills that's in the Distance, All the valleys yes and plains
They have left me nothing stranger, In response to all my pains.
I have given up the shade trees and the brooks that run so clear.
Still they hunt me listen stranger, In response to all my pains
I am never free from fear.

My forage grounds are dreary wastes no sagebrush here to tire
Nothing but the western sun, to make my picking dryer.
Now they come with pick and sombro, over ridges hill and dale
Say they guess they'll have to put me in a labeled CAN TO SELL.

The Mustangs Reward – Written by Perrin L. Cummings - 1926

One of the challenges facing the early settlers in the Pryor Mountain area was the wild horse. Presently numbering around 120 (on the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range), wild horses by the thousands supposedly roamed the area before the arrival of the white man. Bess Tillett, an "old-timer" who owns a ranch on Crooked Creek, claims the wild horses were here when she first came to the area in 1894.

Columbus re-introduced the horse to North America (there had been a type of horse here earlier, but it became extinct or went over the Siberian bridge to Asia). But it was actually Cortez who brought the horse to the mainland, from the West Indies to Mexico in 1519. Many claim that today's wild horses are the descendants of Cortez's horses. Author Hope Ryden claims that, even though only a few hundred, pure-blooded descendants of the conquistadors' horses exist today, "Spanish" blood is still evident in all bands of wild horses in the west. Regardless of the massive interbreeding with domestics and runaways that has taken place, Spanish horse traits frequently emerge in wild horses that have as little as 1/32 of Spanish ancestry!¹⁴⁸

The spreading of the horse in America was the result of horses straying away from the conquistadors. The Indians also stole horses from the Spaniards. The Northern Plains Indians

¹⁴⁸ Hope Ryden, *America's Last Wild Horses*, E. A. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1970, pp. 29-30.

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(including the Crows) initially obtained their horses, just prior to the historic period, in trade with the southern tribes, who had stolen them from the Spaniards.¹⁴⁹

In the earlier days in the Pryors, there was little need for fences, since the natural barriers of canyons and steep cliffs contained the livestock where their owners put them. This "open range" policy prevailed in this area long after much of the west was already "fenced" in.¹⁵⁰ But horses could surmount these natural barriers, causing many branded horses to join the wild horse bands that roamed freely throughout the Pryor Mountains. The depressed conditions during the twenties and thirties forced many owners to let their horses go and accounted for the explosion of the wild horse population during that period. These conditions also led to or augmented a way of thinking concerning the authenticity of the wild horses. I found it evident in the minds of many "old-timers" that I interviewed. They believed that all unbranded animals were "runaways" because of the conditions during the twenties and thirties. They felt all horses belong to someone. They just could not be "wild"! Some felt any animal would become "wild" if it is let loose for awhile. Some people were just prejudiced against wild horses. They contended that the horses competed with their cattle and sheep for grazing territory.

The question whether the Pryor Mountain wild horses are truly "wild," descendants of the Spanish horses, is a controversial one. Ron Hall in his report on the wild horses for the Bureau of Land Management, states that William Hamilton, a trapper, roamed the Pryors in 1848, and none of his written observations included references to wild horses. Yet, a map of the spread of the horse in Wyman's "Wild Horse of the West" indicates that horses could have been in the Pryor Mountain area in the early 1700's.¹⁵¹

Hope Ryden speculates that possibly the horses that Sergeant Pryor "lost" in the Pryor Mountains back in 1807 could have augmented the wild horse herd! Therefore, there would be a connection with the conquistador past because the Lewis and Clark expedition obtained their horses from the Indians, who in turn had gotten them from the Spanish. Some also say that possibly the wild horse herd was augmented by the strays from the "Battle of the Little Big Horn." Many believers in the authenticity of the wild horses in the Pryors point to the recent scientific findings that show the vertebrae of some of the Pryor horses are exactly the same as the Spanish horse. Both lack the final vertebra in the spinal column.

Dr. Harold McCracken of Cody, Wyoming, an authority on wild horses, claims that the Crows had 4,000 horses as early as 1874, descendants of the Spanish breed. By 1900, there was an explosion in the horse population. There were 40,000 "Wild Indian Ponies" on the Crow Reservation alone, even though the Indian Agent had sold about 15,000 to the local canneries. Although the Crows had always cherished their horses, the \$3-\$10 a head they received from the sale was used by the tribe to purchase cattle.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Keyhole, *Montana Prehistory*, p. 2.

¹⁵⁰ Ryden, *America's Last Wild Horses*, p. 200.

¹⁵¹ Ron Hall, *Wild Horse - Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range*, Report for the Bureau of Land Management, Billings District Office, Montana.

¹⁵² Bearss, *Bighorn Canyon*, p. 345.

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Hope Ryden claims that a number of ranchers in the past, like the Tilletts of Crooked Creek, have claimed unbranded or wild horses as their own to prevent horse runners from gathering up the herds.

So when the Bureau of Land Management initiated a campaign during the mid-sixties to rid the Pryors of the wild horse herd (numbering around 200 at the time), many residents in the Lovell and Crooked Creek area protested. A group led by the Rev. Floyd Schwieger, a Lovell minister, and Howard Lusch, Pacific Power and Light manager, sought to preserve the wild horses. The horses were considered an invaluable part of our western heritage. Also, the Lovell Chamber of Commerce saw the wild horses as a potential tourist gold mine, because of the establishment of the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area.

The BLM felt the horses were detrimental to the plant life in the area. They did not want the horses competing with livestock for available forage. But ranchers on the Wyoming side of the Pryors, especially the Tilletts, felt the BLM was wrong. They claimed there was plenty of forage for wildlife. The land was too high and water scarce for any other use but for wild horses. Cattle and sheep, for the most part, could not manage the rugged terrain to get to whatever grazing areas there were. Many of them felt, and rightly so, that after the BLM trapped and auctioned off the horses, the horses would most likely end up on the grocery store shelf as pet food. "Many felt that the BLM was trying to 'improve' the land to impress 'higher-ups' in Washington."¹⁵³

The Tilletts, self-appointed guardians of the wild horse herd, claimed all the horses that ran east of Crooked Creek. In March, 1966, the BLM accused the Tilletts of trespassing by violating their Taylor Grazing permit. The permit allowed for only 20 head, not 200! The BLM gave the Tilletts extra time to reduce the herd.

At the end of March, 1966, the BLM announced that they were recommending reduction of the wild horse herd to twenty, and the reintroduction of Big Horn sheep into the area. Many in the BLM felt that the horses were not wild because the Tilletts claimed ownership on domestic grounds. According to Harold Tysk, BLM State Director, referring to the Tilletts and their suspended horse and cattle permits: "If the Tilletts want to keep excess number of horses, could do so by decreasing the number of cattle they ran on their allotment -- either horses or cattle. A rancher using public lands cannot have the whole cake and eat it too."¹⁵⁴

In April, 1966, the Tilletts claimed they would relinquish their owner-ship rights of the wild horse herd provided that the BLM establish a horse refuge, restore to them their grazing permits, and initiate a study of range conditions. With this compromise agreed upon, a one-year reprieve was ordered concerning the fate of the horses.

But by March, 1968, all "leave them alone" proposals concerning the wild horses had fallen upon deaf ears. The BLM proposed, before public hearings, three alternatives concerning the fate of the horses: 1) reduce the herd to 30 or 35, until the watershed recovers, but not to exceed 50 to 60; 2) reduce the herd to 10 to 15, but not to exceed 30; or 3) to corral all the horses, return all the branded ones to the rightful owners, sell the remainder, add more deer to the range, and

¹⁵³ Ryden, *America's Last Wild Horses*, p. 16.

¹⁵⁴ Don Hegg, *Horse Herd not Wild Insists BLM*, Billings Gazette, March 31, 1966, p. 13.

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reintroduce Big Horn sheep.¹⁵⁵ The third proposal was finally agreed upon. There would be an auction of the horses during the summer of 1968.

These proposals by the BLM brought about more public protest. Hope Ryden did an ABC news special on the situation. She toured the horse range with Billings BLM District Manager, Dean Bibles. Mr. Bibles claimed that the removal of the horses was for humane reasons. The horses would starve in their present location, due to the overgrazed terrain. But according to Ms. Ryden, "The horses seemed to be thriving, not starving."

The BLM stated they did not have the adequate funding to assume responsibility for the welfare of the wild horses. They announced "unless some organization or group declared itself willing to sponsor and manage whatever wild horses might be retained in the Pryors, none would be spared."¹⁵⁶ The Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Association, based in Lovell, claimed they would sponsor all 200 of the horses! They sought aid of the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area. The Association claimed that the horses were not starving, had not overgrazed the terrain, and opposed the branding of the horses as being antithetical to their "wild" origin. They felt the BLM was acquiescing to the Montana Fish and Game, who wanted the range to be "improved" for the deer herd, making it more desirable for hunters.

The BLM was also accused of catering to the Montana Livestock Commission. On legal grounds, the BLM could defend its deference to the wishes of the Montana Livestock Commission, because unbranded stray horses were property of the state and so do not belong to the federal government. "Wild Horse" Annie (Mrs. Velma Johnston) well-known wild horse preservationist felt the BLM was pressured by special interest groups who believe that what is not commercially profitable to themselves in their use of public lands must go.¹⁵⁷

The issue went before the U. S. District Court in Washington, D. C. Judge George Hart, impressed by the evidence that wild horses were not starving in the Pryors, instructed the Interior Department to delay any action concerning corralling and disposing of the wild horses. Secretary Udall was supposedly very displeased with the BLM for their outward appearance of disdain for wild horse preservationists. On September 9, 1968, Secretary Udall designated the 32,000-acre Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range. It is situated in the southeast corner of the Pryors, with the national Forest to its northwest, the Big Horn River to its east, and the Crooked Creek Canyon to its west.

Ultimately, Congress gave Udall's order legal sanction by the passage of Public Law 92-195 (December 15, 1971). The BLM and the U. S. Forest Service both were given the responsibility for the welfare of the wild horses.

A special Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Advisory Committee was set up, made up of representatives of private and governmental special interest groups, to hold meetings and make recommendations for the management of the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range.

Since that time, most of the controversies alluding to the wild horses have involved horse populations and control issues. The BLM claimed that reduction was necessary to prevent

¹⁵⁵ *BLM Presents Alternatives for Wild Horses in Pryors*, Powell Tribune, March 15, 1968.

¹⁵⁶ Ryden, *America's Last Wild Horses*, p. 250.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

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starvation. Opponents of reduction claimed that none would starve, if they were just left alone. Another controversy, what to do with the excess horses once reductions were carried out, became another thorn in the side of the BLM. Some advocated "humane killing," but ultimately the proponents of placing excess horses in private ownership won out.

The establishment of a wild horse range was a victory for the preservation of an unique aspect of our western heritage. Besides being a victory for "living history" and the preservation of the horse itself, it is nice to see things preserved that do not necessarily produce material wealth, or "useful" in a buying or selling sense, like cattle or sheep. But if the horses had been on land that was more commercially profitable, I feel their existence would have been terminated a long time ago.

[End Block Citation - "*A General Historical Survey of the Pryor Mountains*"]

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☒ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☒ Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 4.63 Acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 45.209460 | Longitude: -108.559160 |
| 2. Latitude: 45.209500 | Longitude: -108.557550 |
| 3. Latitude: 45.207880 | Longitude: -108.556960 |
| 4. Latitude: 45.207880 | Longitude: -108.557980 |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The east and west boundaries are formed by the base of the hill slopes which form the bottom of the Ranger Creek drainage. The north and south boundaries are defined by arbitrary lines drawn to include the extents of past development and the structures at the property. The northern

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boundary is 400', eastern boundary 630', southern boundary 270', and western boundary 670'.
The encompassed area totals 4.63 acres. See attached maps, Section 9 page 60 and 61.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary approximates reference maps, notably the Forest Service Site Improvement Plans map of 1925, and includes the locations of current and past structures and developments.

11. Form Prepared By

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telephone: 406-444-3647
date: December 5, 2019

Additional Documentation

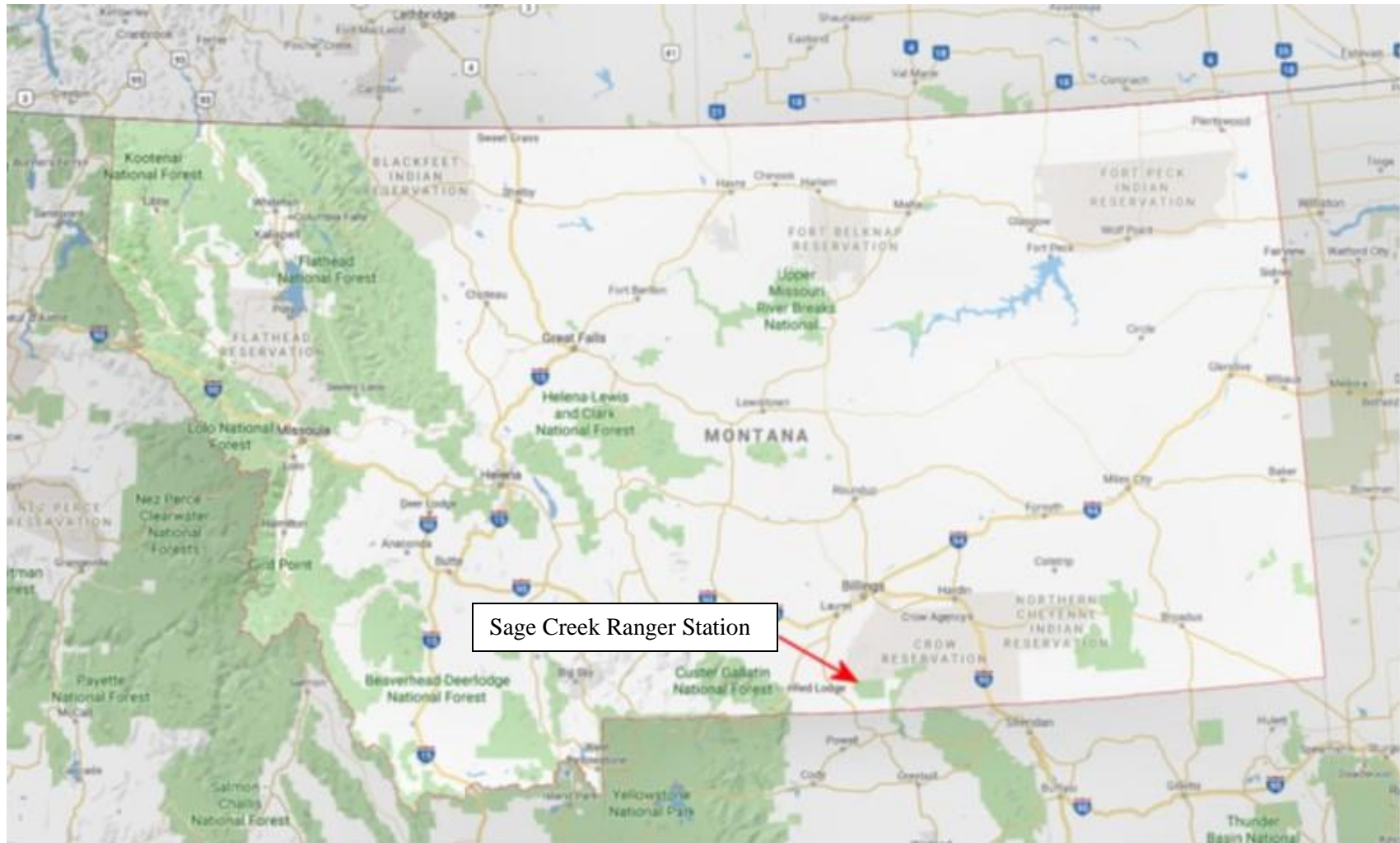
Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

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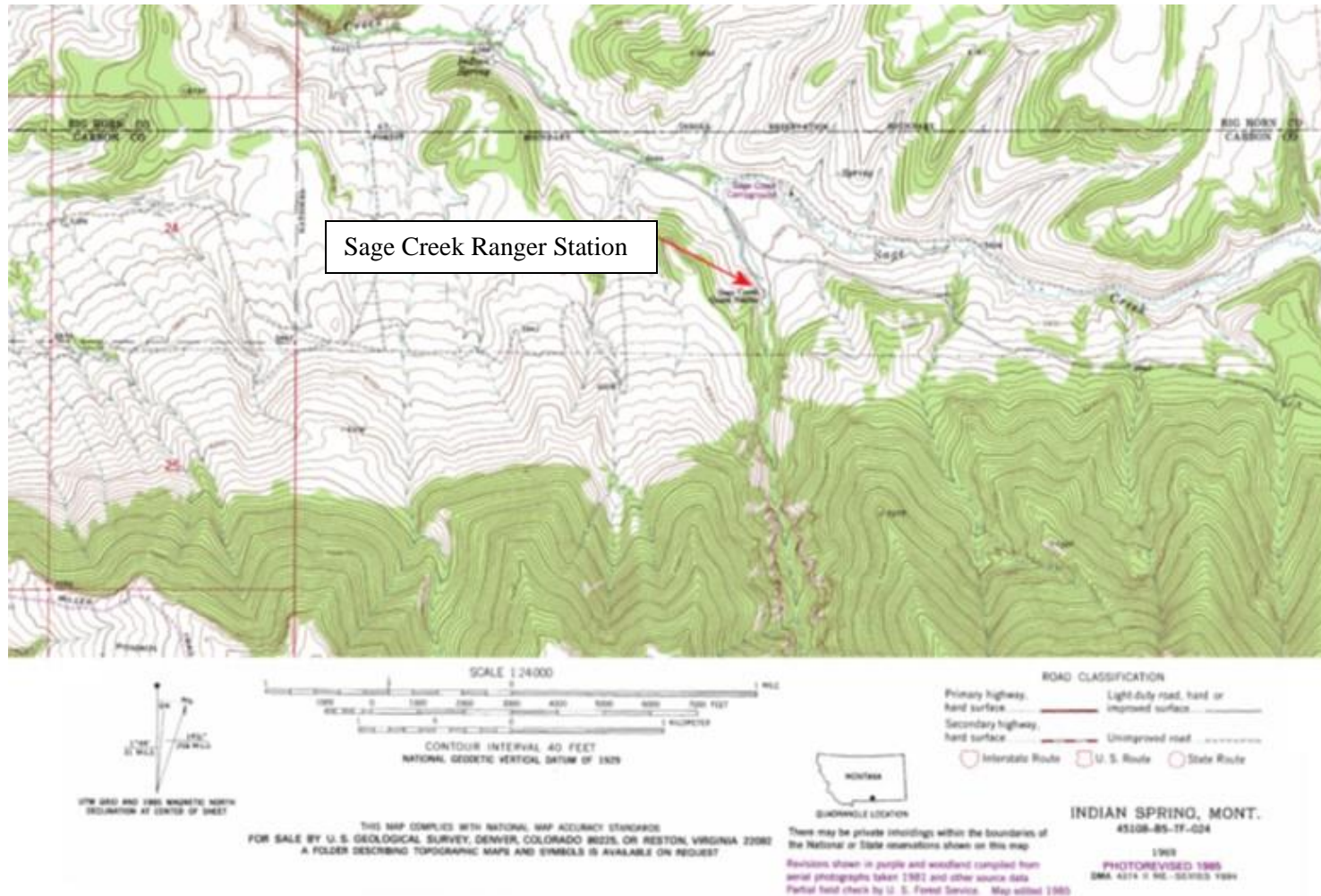
Maps and floorplans



Map Showing General Location of Sage Creek Ranger Station.

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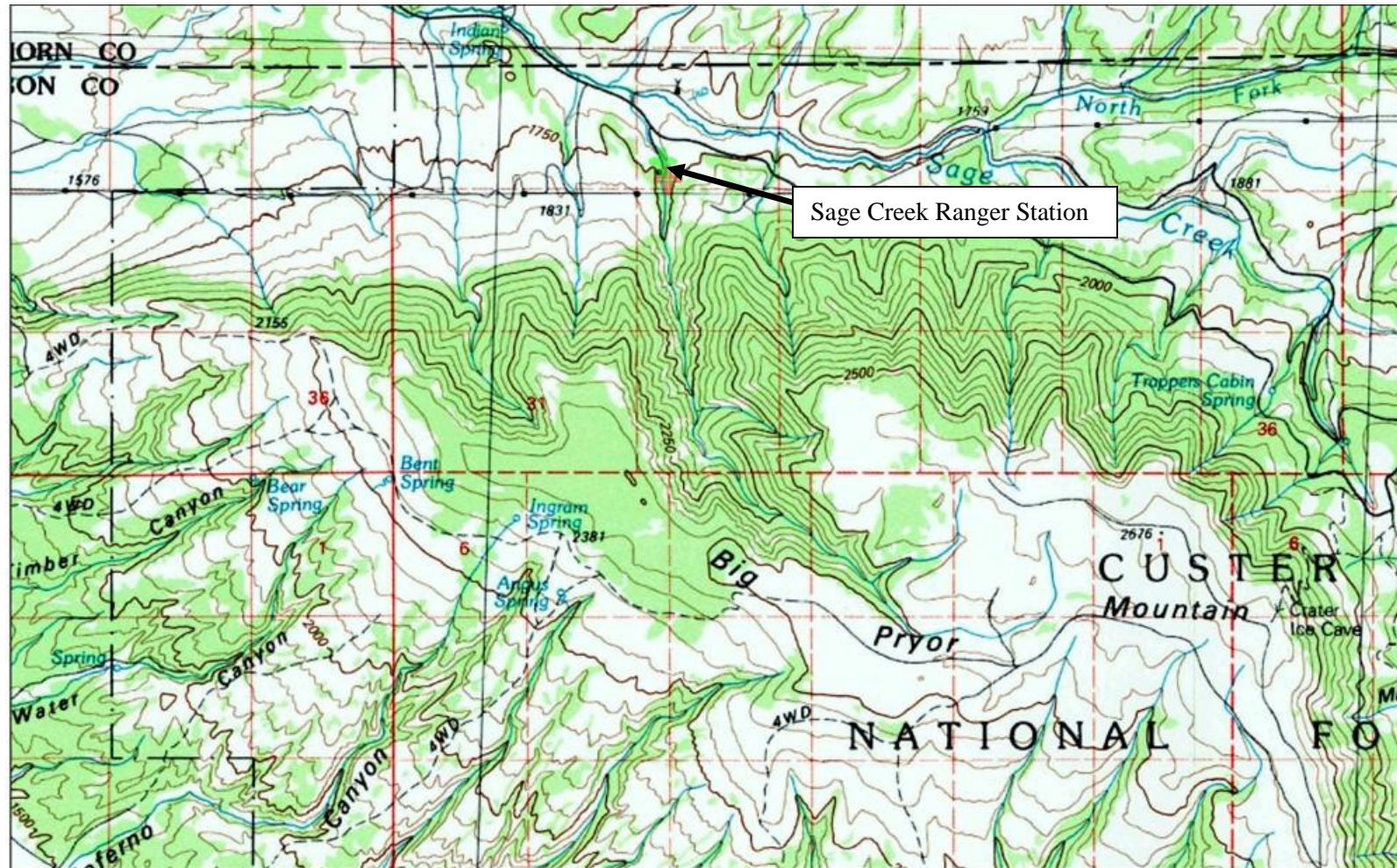
Excerpt from Indian Spring, Montana 7.5' quad map showing the location of the Sage Creek Ranger Station near the northern end of the Pryor Mountain Unit in the Custer Gallatin National Forest. Located in T7S R26E S20.

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Montana State Library - Digital Library
(406) 444-5354 | geoinfo@mt.gov | <http://msl.mt.gov>

Map created using the Digital Atlas November 22, 2019
<http://msl.mt.gov/GIS/Atlas>

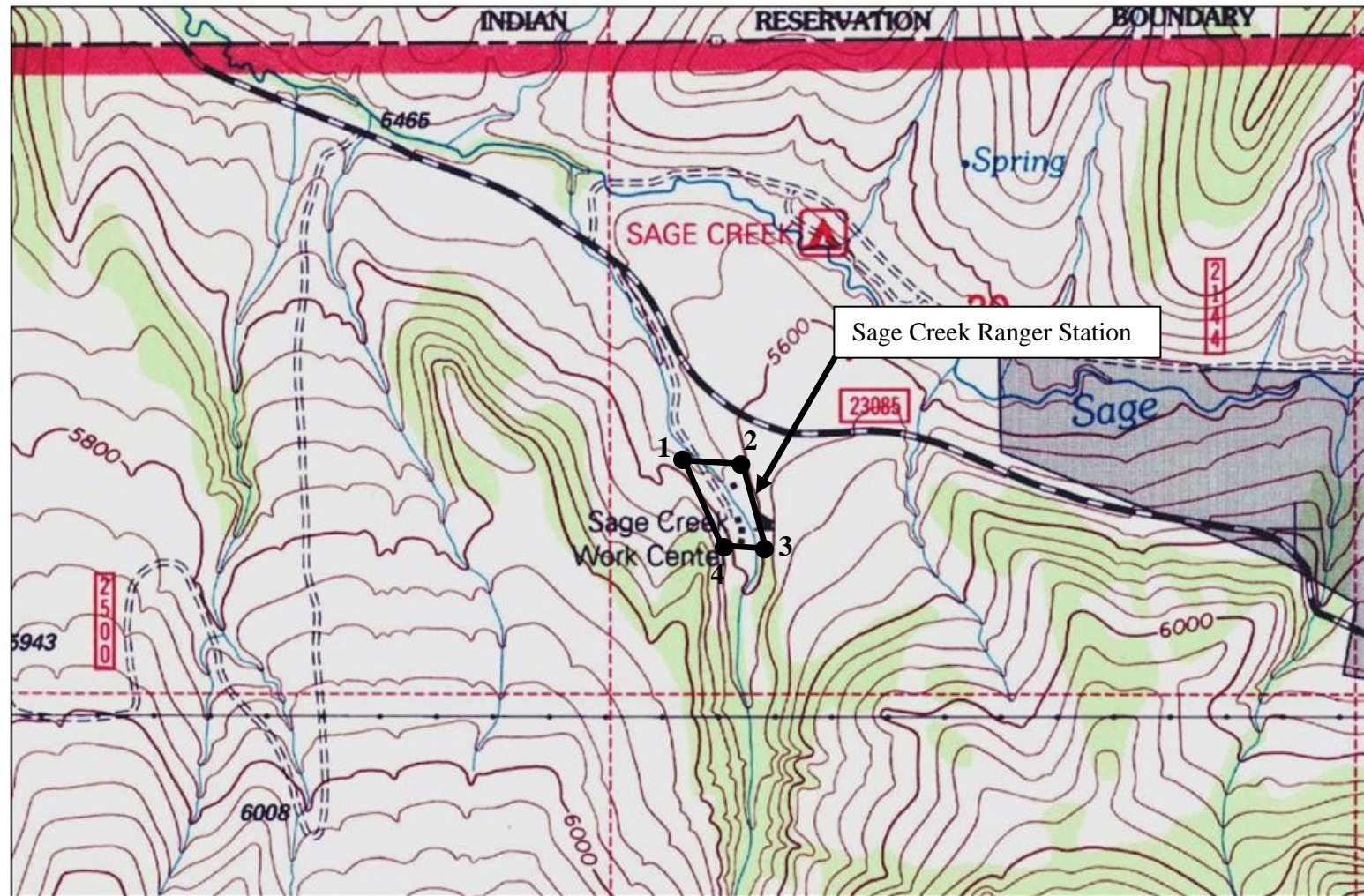
Excerpt from Indian Spring, Montana 7.5' quad map showing the location of the Sage Creek Ranger Station, T7S R26E S20.

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Map created using the Digital Atlas December 2, 2019
<http://msl.mt.gov/GIS/Atlas>

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Close-up of location of Sage Creek Ranger Station (Sage Creek Work Center). Found on the Indian Spring, Montana 7.5' quad map. T7S R26E S20.

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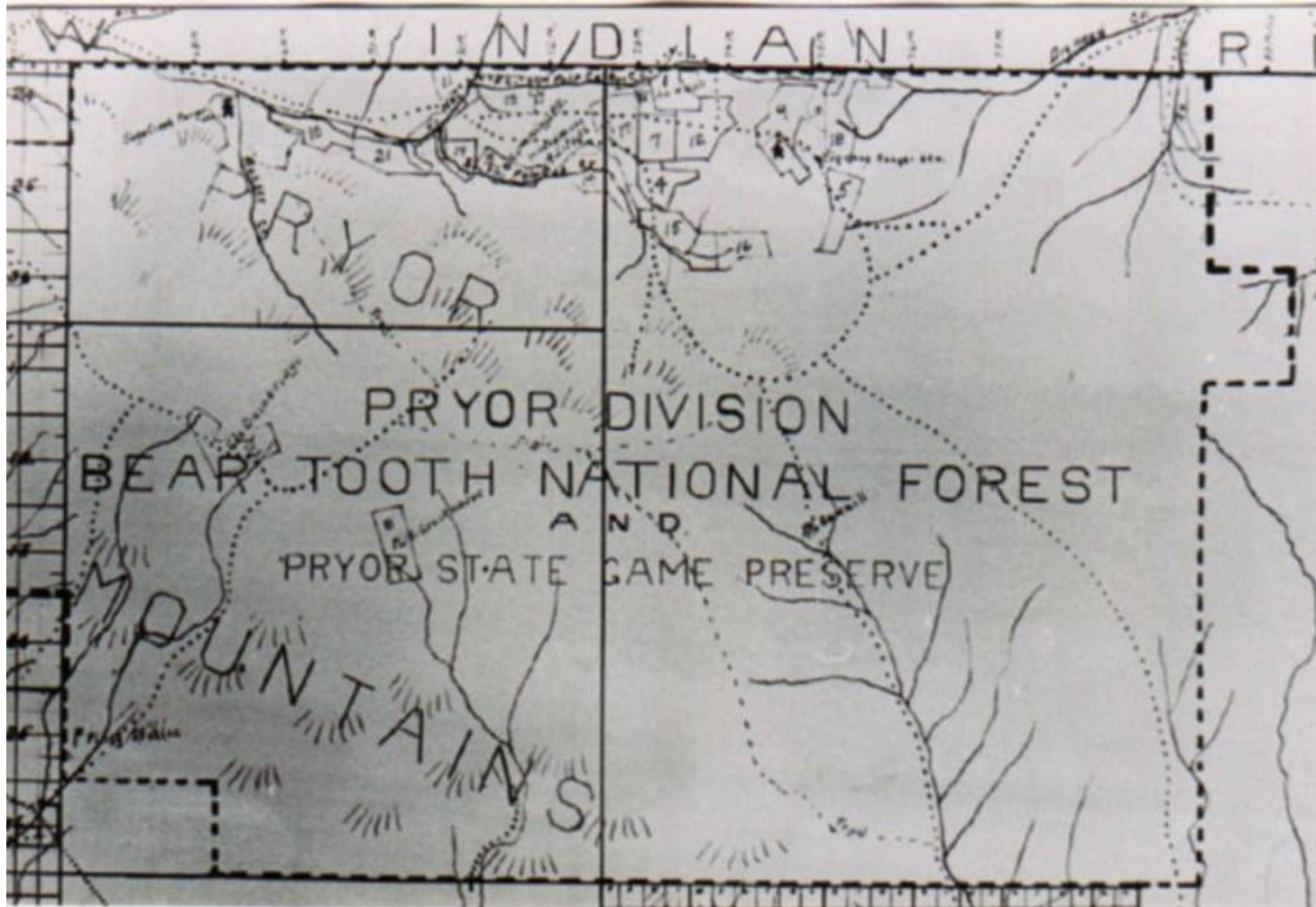
County and State



Site map extracted from Google Earth, based on imagery from October 19, 2017. The boundary represents the extent of the Sage Creek Ranger Station National Register nomination area.

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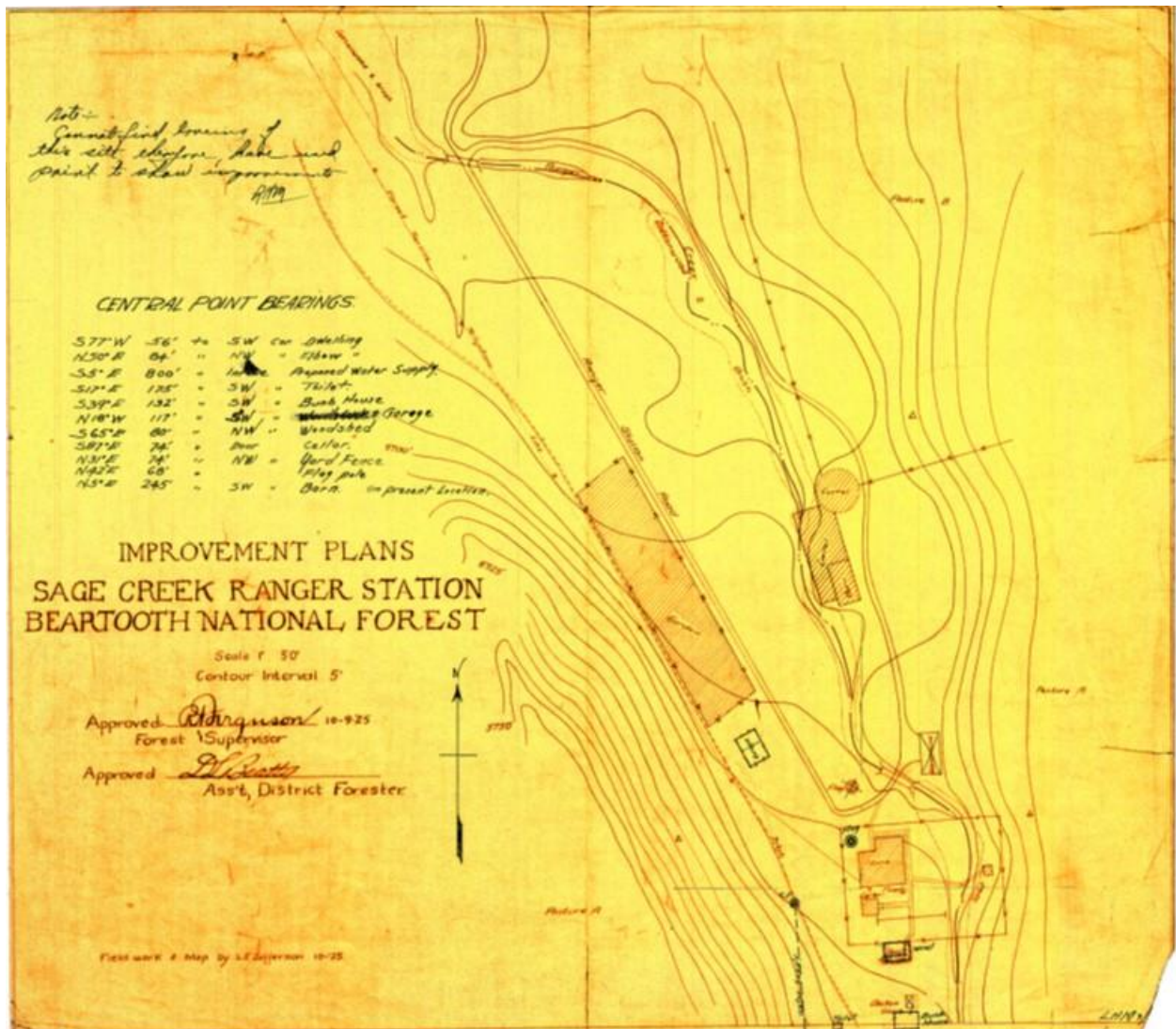


Pryor Division, Bear Tooth National Forest, 1912 showing homestead plots.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ From C. A. Gibson, *Map of Carbon County, Montana, 1912*. Carbon County Court House, Red Lodge, Montana.

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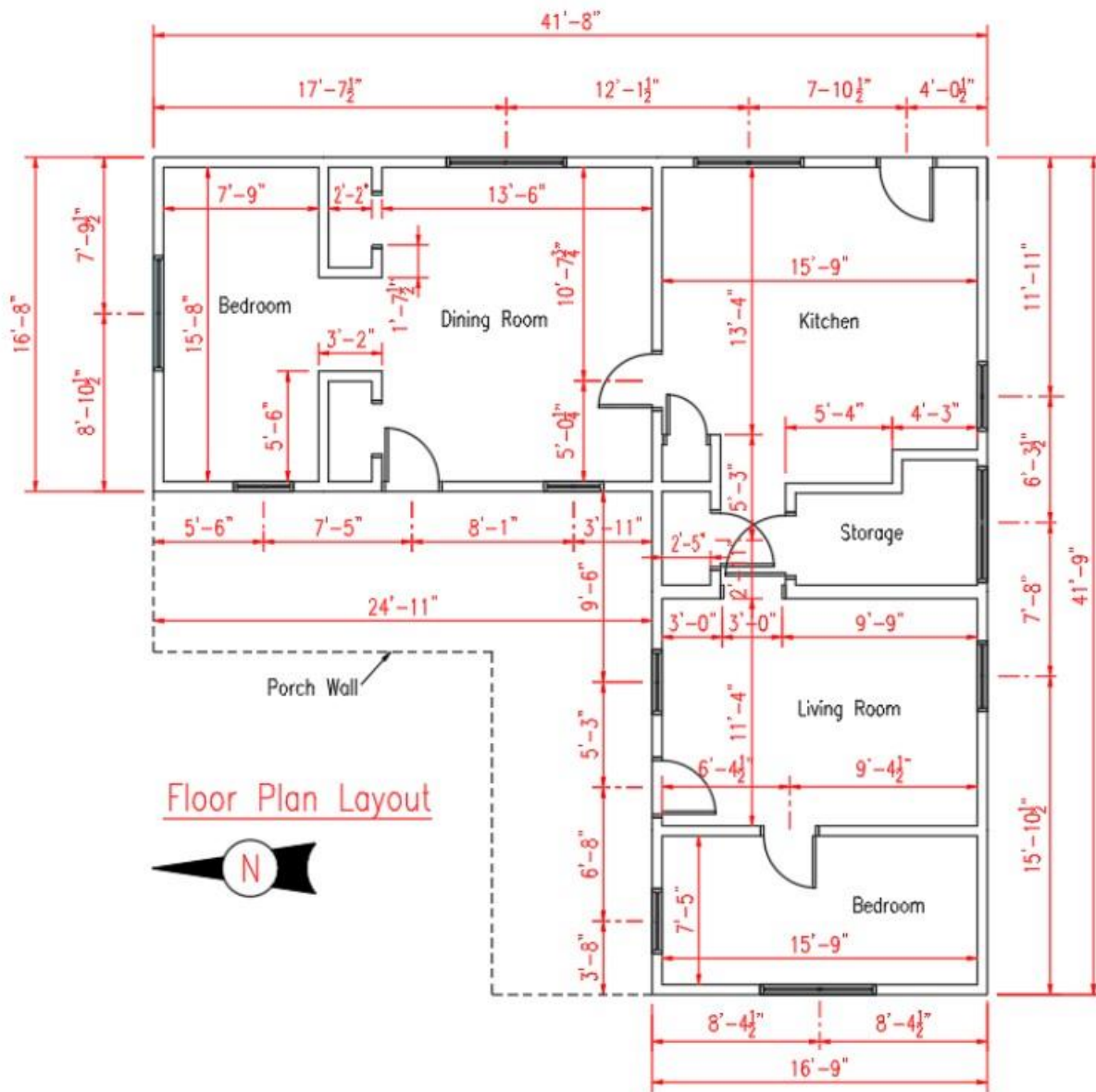
Site map of Sage Creek Ranger Station from 1925.

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Floor plan of the current Main Cabin, as documented in 2005 during a survey conducted by the Drafting and Design Program of the Montana State University Billings College of Technology (Currently City College).

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Historic Photographs



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Raymond A. Coster

Date Photographed: late 1920s

Description: Photo of the Main Cabin from the late 1920s. Looking south up the Ranger Canyon drainage.

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Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Marjorie Coster

Date Photographed: circa 1929

Description: Raymond A. Coster and his daughter Donna May on the north side of the Sage Creek Ranger Station Main Cabin.

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Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Raymond A. Coster

Date Photographed: circa 1929

Description: Marjorie Coster and daughter Donna May on the porch of the Sage Creek Ranger Station Main Cabin.

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Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Marjorie Coster

Date Photographed: circa 1930

Description: Raymond A. Coster and his daughter Donna May on the north side of the Sage Creek Ranger Station Main Cabin.

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Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Barry C. Park

Date Photographed: June 27, 1948

Description: Looking south, up Ranger Canyon. The cabin is in the lower right.

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Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Unknown

Date Photographed: 6-15-1951

Description: Sage Creek Ranger Station. Looking south up Ranger Canyon.

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Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Scott Zinda

Date Photographed: 2005

Description: Photo showing the Sage Creek Ranger Station in 2005 during a survey conducted by the Drafting and Design Program of the Montana State University Billings College of Technology (Currently City College). Photo is looking east by southeast.

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Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Mike Bergstrom

Date Photographed: 2006

Description: Sage Creek Ranger Station. Photo looking east in 2006 after the cabin had been raised and sat on supports.

Sage Creek Ranger Station
Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana
County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Mike Bergstrom

Date Photographed: 2006

Description: Sage Creek Ranger Station. Looking south during the 2006 cabin rising in preparation for a foundation. At this time, the cabin is said to be sitting on “needles,” the horizontal timbers and “cribbing,” the stacked wood supports. The cabin spent the winter in this position.

Sage Creek Ranger Station

Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana

County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Mike Bergstrom

Date Photographed: 2007

Description: Sage Creek Ranger Station. Looking southeast during the installation of the foundation. The plywood was used in combination with snap-ties to form the foundation on top of the new footing.

Sage Creek Ranger Station
Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana
County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Mike Bergstrom

Date Photographed: 2007

Description: Sage Creek Ranger Station. Looking east in 2007 with the new foundation in place under Main Cabin and backfill completed.

Sage Creek Ranger Station
Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana
County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Mike Bergstrom

Date Photographed: 2007

Description: Sage Creek Ranger Station Main Cabin. Looking at the north wall as Nahani peers out of the completed foundation.

Sage Creek Ranger Station
Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana
County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Mike Bergstrom

Date Photographed: 2008

Description: Sage Creek Ranger Station. Looking southwest at the integral, yet noncontributing outhouse installed in 2008.

Sage Creek Ranger Station
Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana
County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Mike Bergstrom

Date Photographed: 2009

Description: Sage Creek Ranger Station. Looking south in 2009, showing the corral, cabin, and outdoor privy.

Sage Creek Ranger Station

Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana

County and State

National Register Photographs



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: James Busse

Date Photographed: August 13, 2019

Description: Panorama looking east

MT_CarbonCounty_SageCreekRangerStation_0001

Sage Creek Ranger Station

Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana

County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Tim Urbaniak

Date Photographed: August 13, 2019

Description: Panorama southwest by west

MT_CarbonCounty_SageCreekRangerStation_0002

Sage Creek Ranger Station
Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana
County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Tim Urbaniak

Date Photographed: August 13, 2019

Description: Sage Creek Ranger Station with flagpole on right, looking southeast

MT_CarbonCounty_SageCreekRangerStation_0003

Sage Creek Ranger Station

Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana

County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Tim Urbaniak

Date Photographed: August 13, 2019

Description: Sage Creek Ranger Station, with flagpole on left, looking east

MT_CarbonCounty_SageCreekRangerStation_0004

Sage Creek Ranger Station
Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana
County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Tim Urbaniak

Date Photographed: August 13, 2019

Description: Sage Creek Ranger Station, looking north

MT_CarbonCounty_SageCreekRangerStation_0005

Sage Creek Ranger Station

Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana

County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Tim Urbaniak

Date Photographed: August 13, 2019

Description: Sage Creek Ranger Station, looking west

MT_CarbonCounty_SageCreekRangerStation_0006

Sage Creek Ranger Station

Carbon County, Montana

Name of Property

County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Tim Urbaniak

Date Photographed: August 13, 2019

Description: Sage Creek Ranger Station. Saw-cut logs used on the west leg of the 'L.'

View is looking south at the northern wall

MT_CarbonCounty_SageCreekRangerStation_0007

Sage Creek Ranger Station

Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana

County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Tim Urbaniak

Date Photographed: August 13, 2019

Description: Sage Creek Ranger Station. Hewn logs used on the north leg of the 'L'. Photo is looking east at the western log wall. Note the tar daubing and the fire scar on the log

MT_CarbonCounty_SageCreekRangerStation_0008

Sage Creek Ranger Station
Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana
County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Tim Urbaniak

Date Photographed: August 13, 2019

Description: Sage Creek Ranger Station. Interior, northernmost room, looking southwest
MT_CarbonCounty_SageCreekRangerStation_0009

Sage Creek Ranger Station
Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana
County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Tim Urbaniak

Date Photographed: August 13, 2019

Description: Sage Creek Ranger Station. Interior, looking north through the built-in cabinet wall

MT_CarbonCounty_SageCreekRangerStation_0010

Sage Creek Ranger Station

Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana

County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Tim Urbaniak

Date Photographed: August 13, 2019

Description: Sage Creek Ranger Station. Interior, looking south through the built-in cabinet wall toward the kitchen. Note the step up from the dining room

MT_CarbonCounty_SageCreekRangerStation_0011

Sage Creek Ranger Station

Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana

County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Tim Urbaniak

Date Photographed: August 13, 2019

Description: Sage Creek Ranger Station. Interior, looking north through the dining room from the kitchen. Note the worn original threshold, stepping down into the dining room

MT_CarbonCounty_SageCreekRangerStation_0012

Sage Creek Ranger Station

Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana

County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Tim Urbaniak

Date Photographed: August 13, 2019

Description: Sage Creek Ranger Station. Interior, stitched image of the kitchen area looking east. Note the visible purlins in the ceiling

MT_CarbonCounty_SageCreekRangerStation_0013

Sage Creek Ranger Station

Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana

County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Tim Urbaniak

Date Photographed: August 13, 2019

Description: Sage Creek Ranger Station. Interior, looking east in the living room, toward the kitchen

MT_CarbonCounty_SageCreekRangerStation_0014

Sage Creek Ranger Station

Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana

County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Tim Urbaniak

Date Photographed: August 13, 2019

Description: Sage Creek Ranger Station. Interior, upper view looking east in the living room toward the kitchen

MT_CarbonCounty_SageCreekRangerStation_0015

Sage Creek Ranger Station

Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana

County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Tim Urbaniak

Date Photographed: August 13, 2019

Description: Sage Creek Ranger Station: Interior, looking north in the westernmost bedroom, with the living room to the right

MT_CarbonCounty_SageCreekRangerStation_0016

Sage Creek Ranger Station
Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana
County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Tim Urbaniak

Date Photographed: August 13, 2019

Description: Looking northwest out the window of the western bedroom.

MT_CarbonCounty_SageCreekRangerStation_0017

Sage Creek Ranger Station

Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana

County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Tim Urbaniak

Date Photographed: August 13, 2019

Description: Panorama looking northeast with location of ditch indicated in background by black line

MT_CarbonCounty_SageCreekRangerStation_0018

Sage Creek Ranger Station

Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana

County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Tim Urbaniak

Date Photographed: December 27, 2019

Description: Post-and-Pole corral

MT_CarbonCounty_SageCreekRangerStation_0019

Sage Creek Ranger Station
Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana
County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station
City or Vicinity: Bridger
County: Carbon State: Montana
Photographer: Tim Urbaniak
Date Photographed: August 13, 2019
Description: Main Cabin with flagpole in foreground.
MT_CarbonCounty_SageCreekRangerStation_0020

Sage Creek Ranger Station
Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana
County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Tim Urbaniak

Date Photographed: December 27, 2019

Description: Main Irrigation ditch

MT_CarbonCounty_SageCreekRangerStation_0021

Sage Creek Ranger Station

Name of Property

Carbon County, Montana

County and State



Name of Property: Sage Creek Ranger Station

City or Vicinity: Bridger

County: Carbon

State: Montana

Photographer: Tim Urbaniak

Date Photographed: December 27, 2019

Description: Main Outhouse

MT_CarbonCounty_SageCreekRangerStation_0022

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.